

## BLACK LIGHTNING

*Black Lightning* is set in contemporary Australia. It depicts the struggle of forty-five-year-old Tempe Caxton to find a meaning for her life when she is deserted by her lover and loses her job as a professional model because she is too old. Typical of many lonely middle-aged women with no goal in life, she attempts suicide and fails. The book opens with her return to consciousness, despairing, embittered, alone

The discovery that her dead son has left a daughter (now aged five) by a part Aboriginal girl galvanizes her into life. The child needs her help. The Aboriginal family that has reared her is being evicted from the island they have occupied for over a century.

If she is to help them, Tempe realizes that she must step out of the fashionable, conformist world in which she has lived, throw herself into an unpopular cause, associate with people she has despised. But . . . the child is the link with life she needs. Her conflict takes her onto an Aboriginal Reserve in a country town and into the little-known Aboriginal community that has grown up in the slums of Sydney. In her deepening knowledge of her granddaughter's people and their problems she finds reason to live, aware that though the future she faces may not be easy, it will have meaning for her.

BOOKS BY  
DYMPHNA CUSACK

NOVELS

*Jungfrau*  
*Pioneers on Parade* (with Miles Franklin)  
*Come In, Spinner* (with Florence James)  
*The Sun in Exile*  
*Southern Steel*  
*Say No to Death*  
*Heatwave in Berlin*  
*Picnic Races*  
*Black Lightning*

GENERAL

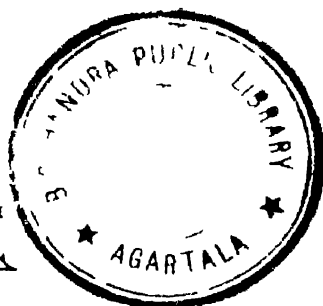
*Chinese Women Speak*  
*Holidays Among the Russians*

PLAYS

*Red Sky at Morning*  
*Morning Sacrifice*  
*Comets Soon Pass*  
*Shoulder the Sky*  
*Time, Stand Still*  
*The Golden Girls*  
*Pacific Paradise*  
*Exit*

# Black Lightning

DYMPHNA CUSACK



HEINEMANN: LONDON

**William Heinemann Ltd**  
**LONDON MELBOURNE TORONTO**  
**CAPE TOWN AUCKLAND**

**Printed in Great Britain by**  
**Northumberland Press Limited**  
**Gateshead on Tyne**



## PART ONE

BLIND, deaf, numb, she floated in a cloudy cocoon, suspended between death and life. Out of nothingness a measured drumming began. Picasso-patterns wove themselves against the dark in luminous spirals, flashing spears. Light seeped through sealed lids. Splinters of sound pierced the clogged cotton-wool of her brain in which no thought stirred. Only the awareness that light was pain, sound was pain.

Somewhere a dog barked, ripping open the cocoon. A hammer thudded against the walls of her skull, cracking the bones, pulping the sodden flesh. A spark of mind glimmered. She knew she was alive. The thudding was a pulse driving a reluctant heart, rousing a drugged body.

Thud, thud, thud. Excruciating in its regularity and precision, it drove the blood through blocked channels, beat on dulled nerves, drummed in deaf ears, pricked weightless hands, while mind rejected the life inexorably thrust back upon her.

Nausea tore her apart; but only a sour saliva filled her mouth.

She moaned. An icy cloth on her forehead and cheeks. Lavender water on her hair. A rush of air. A vibration of footsteps. Voices—a slate-pen's screech. A cool hand on her wrist. Fingers turning back her eyelid.

Her flesh shrivelled at the touch. The insensate hulk

she was beginning to recognize as 'I' resisted the forces that conspired to make her live again.

Squeak of rubber-soled shoes across the floor; soft whoosh of the door's closing. Silence.

Despair surged through her as though the blood was carrying the poison in its stream.

\* \* \* \* \*

Incalculable light-years away a radio blared out a fanfare of trumpets, sank to a thread of sound.

The dog barked and anguish swept her back again to the frail bridge linking the Harbour lighthouse to the shore. Jasper was barking, the waves thudding on the rocks, the wind lashing the tower and the warning light splitting the darkness with its pulsing green flash. In the tumult of her mind the luminous rainbow of the Bridge's arc, the ferries skimming on jewelled feet, mooring lights swaying in the swell, whirled in a fantastic dance against a skyline where skyscrapers raised irregular patterns of light and the running neon signs wrote illegible messages to the sky.

Why hadn't she, too, died? Then there could be no return. No dreading return. Why had she not flung herself into the sea with Jasper in her arms?

In a flare of memory she saw his quivering body, his trusting eyes, as she gave him the tablet in a chocolate. She felt his jaws close on it, his throat move as he gulped it and she stood again, waiting for the quick, clean death Keith had promised. Instead...

She clenched her teeth but had no force in her jaws. She

clenched her hands but her fingers did not move and she lay inert, oblivious of the world, whilst she lived again Jasper's interminable struggle with death. Again she knelt, pressing him to her, feeling his writhing limbs, seeing, in the intermittent occulting flash, his eyes bewildered that she should do this to him. Again she was racked as he had been racked with each convulsion till he lay, sweat-soaked, exhausted, his tortured eyes still fixed on hers. The harsh breathing ceased. His eyes glazed over. She had killed the one thing that loved her; the one thing that was faithful to her. And she was alive.

Sobs welled up in her throat like bubbles. . . .

A needle pricked her arm.

\* \* \* \* \*

Countless aeons later a staccato bark rent the fog enshrouding her. Incredulous, she heard Jasper barking his familiar welcome, saw his sharp ears, his joyous twinkling eyes, felt his velvet tongue against her hand. Then memory clicked and she knew Jasper was dead.

Whimpering, she tried to push back the relentless force that peeled the comfort of drugged sleep from her.

A hand patted hers. 'There, there, Tempe dear,' Aunt Lilian's voice burrowed into her ears. 'There, there, now, dearie, don't worry; the worst's over.'

The pulse thudded on: Tem-pee—Tem-pee—Tem-pee.

The weight on her lids was so heavy that she could not open her eyes. She did not want to open them, for the pity in Aunt Lilian's face would be more than she could bear.

Aunt Lilian's whisper swished: 'She seems to be coming to.'

A whisper in reply: 'Yes, but she'll be pretty well out to it for some time yet.'

'But she'll be all right, won't she?'

'Of course.'

A nurse's voice. Impatient, as though it was ridiculous to make so much fuss about coming back to life.

She lay listening to a creaking, clicking faint sound. Aunt Lilian was knitting and that interminable knitting at her bedside when she had come back from the dead was a last proof of absurdity in a meaningless world. She exerted a flicker of will and moved her head on the pillow. Pain exploded in her skull. She lay still.

Aunt Lilian sighed: 'Wasn't it lucky I just happened to come in then? I haven't been in for weeks. When I woke up yesterday morning I had a kind of premonition you might say—I get them sometimes—and I thought: Something's wrong with Tempe. So I just packed up my knitting, got on a bus, and there she was. Just like somebody dead, only she was breathing. I rang the doctor and before I could turn round the ambulance arrived and she was here.'

'A lucky hunch of yours.' The nurse gave a whinnying laugh. 'Funny her doing a thing like that. Popular T.V. star. Photo always in the paper. Plenty of money. All that romance and glamour. Bit like what happened to Marilyn Monroe.'

Aunt Lilian retorted quickly: 'It was an accident. The man in the downstairs flat told me she was terribly upset because her little dog was killed.'

'You don't do that for a dog.'

The door whooshed. She was alone.

Her parched lips breathed: 'I can't bear it.'

'I, I, I.' The incoming tide of memory washed over this strange 'I' lying atrophied in a hospital bed.

Was there anyone who would believe that the death of a little dog meant that the life she had returned to was unbearable?

'Sentimental twaddle,' Keith would say. He had left her lonely. She had come back to worse loneliness.

'I can't bear it,' she whispered. Yet never again would she be able to swallow the tablets, knowing that when she lay down to sleep she would not wake.

Keith had given him to her on their tenth anniversary. Tenth anniversary! The word began beating in her mind, following the rhythm of her pulse. Ann-iv-er-sa-rec. Ann-iv-er-sa-ree. Ann-iv-cr-sa-ree.

It had all seemed so easy when she had decided to kill herself and Jasper. She had taken from the medicine chest the tiny phial Keith had bought to poison the house-cat because she had kittens too often. Quick and painless he'd said, and smiled as he said it.

It was like her to decide to plunge into the sea. A romantic escape devised by a sentimental woman who found life too bitter. But she had not plunged into the sea. Instead, she had turned and scrambled up the rough path and fled like a haunted thing along the cliff's edge with Jasper in her arms. The wind drove a stinging shower across her face. She tasted again the salt of her tears mingled with the rain on her lips. She pulled off her scarf and put it around the little body, laid it beneath the frangipani tree, dropped to her knees and cried as she had not cried when her father died, when her son was killed, when Keith left her.

She felt again the spade sink into the damp earth as she began to dig. A light blinded her.

'What on earth are you doing, Mrs Caxton?'

The torchlight settled on the body. The old man lifted the scarf and cried out. 'Good heavens! Not the little Silky? Knocked by a car, was he? Poor little fella. Dead as a doornail and not a mark on him.'

He handed her the torch and took the spade from her. 'Here, now, you hold the light and I'll dig. Don't take on like that. Tch, tch! As nice a little dog as I ever knew. Real fond of him I was.'

The wet earth piled up. Then he put the spade aside, picked up the body and wrapped it in the scarf saying: 'That'll be deep enough. He was only a little fella.'

Her sobs burst out again and he led her to her flat like a weeping child.

The 'I' she had left last night in her own bed possessed her again. She saw herself move like a wraith to the bathroom cabinet; take down the bottle of tranquillizers, pour them into her palm, lift them to her mouth, wash them down with a glass of whisky. The doctor had said: 'It's dangerous to take spirits after sedatives.' She saw herself shaking with laughter at the irony of considering anything dangerous but life, as she stood swaying in the bathroom. She feared that she would retch as she filled the glass with water and swallowed again. She lay down on the bed and the shadow mingled with the flesh.

Fear flared too late. She had tried to raise herself to telephone for help, but already the drug had begun to course through the blood, seep through the muscles and nerves.

The embers of her mind faded slowly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Searing pain dragged her from coma rather than sleep. The clinking of bottles pounded her nerves. A trickle of comprehension told her that the flaccid flesh in the bed was hers.

She wet her cracked lips with a sand-papery tongue. The gall in her mouth tainted everything.

Death had rejected her and she lay taut with the bitterness of unwanted life. The rattle of dishes sounded below and footsteps echoed along corridors. Doors opened and shut.

She started at each recurring sound, waiting nervously as the footsteps passed and repassed. Soon she must face not only the painful light and the bleak day, but people. See the question behind their eyes—contempt or, worse still, pity. Pity was the seal on failure.

\* \* \* \* \*

She lay with her eyes tightly closed, refusing to open them, for with their opening life would begin again.

Aunt Lilian came, bringing grapefruit too expensive for her pension, and tuberose, their scent too heavy for the small room. She heard her whispered conversation with the nurse who came in.

‘Still out to it, but she looks better.’

‘She’s all right,’ the nurse said. ‘She’ll sleep it off now. I’ve often seen her on television.’

‘Have you?’ Aunt Lilian’s voice rose in gratified pride. ‘She’s very popular on television.’

‘She looks a lot older than I expected her to be.’

‘You can’t expect anyone to look their best at a time like this,’ Aunt Lilian’s voice was indignant.

‘How old is she?’

‘Forty-one,’ Aunt Lilian lied, as though cutting off four years in some way protected the inert heap in the bed. If she could have moved her lips she would have shrieked out the truth, but her tongue was a dry sponge in her mouth, her lips made of rubber.

‘Queer, no one else’s been here but you.’

‘I’m her only relation, and I don’t want anyone worrying her,’ Aunt Lilian said importantly. ‘They’d be here in crowds if they knew.’

Lies, lies, lies.

\* \* \* \* \*

Between dream and waking she retreated to the safe world of her childhood. Once more she ran down winding bush-tracks where fallen leaves padded her footsteps so that they became part of the enveloping silence.

Silence was a real thing, poised between the gnarled roots of gum-trees and their branches holding up the blue sky on umbrellas of patent-leather leaves. Silence took her and wrapped her and held her till it splintered into a myriad infinitesimal sounds: wind running with a silken swishing through the treetops; bark falling with a soundless shudder; a bellbird dropping a silver tinkle into the silence that closed back over it deeper than ever.

She rested her cheek against a tree-trunk and felt it smooth as human skin, only cooler. She held her ear to it and imagined she heard the sap pulse like the blood in her own wrist.

She lay on the earth, feeling the dried growth prickle against her bare knees; the hot breath of the earth, its



motionless movement rising and falling with her own; the fresh grass sending out shoots, tender and sweet; watching ants busy in the cups of flowerets growing close to the ground; ladybirds carrying their lacquered, spotted armour along thin stalks. In the pervading silence she could hear even the grass grow.

\* \* \* \* \*

She came out of a dream she did not remember. Involuntarily her lids lifted. The light burned her eyes. A nurse smiled down at her. She saw only the smile and the crossed front teeth; the rest was blurred.

‘Feeling better this morning, Mrs Caxton?’ The voice rasped on her nerves. ‘You’re looking better. Doctor will be pleased. Now, what about a nice cup of strong tea? That nice aunt of yours brought a packet of the best Indian, and she says you like it strong and without milk. Is that right?’

She nodded, and pain stabbed the back of her head. The door closed, opened, and the nurse set a chrome tray on the table.

‘Now maybe you’d like to sit up a bit.’

A strong arm slid under hers, arranged the pillows deftly behind her. She sat up, with her head whirling at the movement. A warm cloth moved over her face and hands.

‘Just to freshen you up. I’ll give you a really good wash afterwards, or maybe you’ll even feel well enough to come to the bathroom. Drink up your tea now, and when you feel better we’ll plan things, shall we?’

She saw the plump fingers close around the raffia-covered

handle of the teapot, the amber liquid fall steaming from its spout, smelt its fragrant steam as the nurse lifted a cup to her lips. She drank, ashamed of her own helplessness.

'There you are,' the nurse said with irritating cheerfulness as she finished the second cup. 'That'll drive the cobwebs away.'

That was what it was doing, lifting the clinging network that enmeshed her mind and body, leaving her not only naked but flayed, so that all her body was a shrinking tangle of exposed nerves.

Each act designed to bring her back to herself served only to alienate her. Aunt Lilian had brought from the flat her personal luxuries. The bath was perfumed with her own bath-salts; the shampoo was her own shampoo; the silk nightgown hers. Refreshed, she lay back against the pillows in the room whose colours were chosen to soothe those whose nerves had temporarily failed them, and closed her lids as she tried to shutter her mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

When she opened her eyes Aunt Lilian was knitting by the bedside, exuding her familiar air of reliability, her kind eyes full of unasked questions, a steady flow of inconsequential conversation on her lips.

She remembered Aunt Lilian knitting during the long evenings when she sat helping her father arrange his botanical specimens. The light of the lamp fell on his square hands, fingers nicotine-stained, the quicks of his nails always white with chalk-dust. The lamplit circle became a symbol of her childish world, where the protecting arms of

her father and Aunt Lilian formed a barrier against the dark and the terrors that lurked in it.

Not till she shot suddenly out of her child world into girlhood filled with romantic dreams had the loving arms of her fond protectors become a prison. It was such a mood as this that swept her, barely eighteen, into what she thought was love.

Aunt Lilian's presence filled her with guilt. In spite of all that had happened she continued to pour out on her the unchanged affection that, once given a motherless child, had persisted throughout the years and through all her disloyalties.

Aunt Lilian was murmuring in her comfortable voice: 'The Matron says the doctor thinks it's not good for you to be living alone when you've not been well 'specially now you won't have Jasper. Dear, dear, what a shame! I always say those careless drivers ought to be locked up. Such a lovely little dog he was. You're going to miss him. So I thought that maybe...'

Tempe knew she was hinting what she would never ask in so many words—that she should come and housekeep for her. She had always ignored the hint before. Now she saw it not only as a sign of Aunt Lilian's affection, which had never wavered, but of her loneliness.

She laid a hand over the older woman's and forced a smile. 'Maybe. We'll see when I feel stronger.'

She closed her eyes, pretending to sleep, felt Aunt Lilian's lips on her forehead and the perfume of her inevitable lavender water pervading everything.

The door whooshed. A void engulfed her.



Life returned pitilessly. Loneliness hung over her like the mushroom cloud of desolation, ate into her mind, her heart, the very marrow of her bones.

She would lie awake for interminable hours when drugs failed to bring sleep, wondering how many years she would go on living with the death-wish in her soul, yet not daring to die.

'You don't do that for a dog,' the nurse had said. 'No,' she answered silently. 'You do it because your life has shattered around you.'

Keith's desertion had taken the keystone out of the ramshackle structure of her existence and let it crumble round her so that she was open to all the winds of life.

Now the image of his head was before her shuttered eyes in an aura of its own radiation. So she had seen him the day he burst into her life as she knelt on the beach helping Christopher build a sand castle. 'Do you mind if I photograph you?' he said.

She looked up, startled and haughty. He was between her and the sun, which made an aureole of his salt-stiffened hair.

The photograph had been splashed over the evening papers: 'Grass-war-widow and son,' and had rocketed her out of her uneventful suburban life. Now his face was before her closed eyes as in a film, so close that she saw, as she had so often seen, the thick brush of his eyebrows above eyes the indefinable colour of a foggy sea, his fawnish wiry hair bleached by the sun, the full line of his lips under the bristles of his pale moustache.

If it was love she felt for him all these years, then she loved him from that first moment. However deeply she came to know him, however inseparably he became part of her flesh and mind, however completely her life came to depend on him, she never knew him better than in that first

moment of shock when he not only stood between her and the sun but took its place.

When Keith went out of her life she learned that there is pain worse than death.

Christopher's death was a shattering blow. Incredulity, anguish and resentment tore at her heart. Dead, he became magically again the child who for his first five years had been her fulfilment. All the things she had thought forgotten came back to her as she lay sleepless: his tiny hand around her fingers, his lips at her breast, his toothless smile, his first uncertain steps.

When he was killed in the Malayan jungle she was appalled that what had underlain all her consciousness had been forgotten because he had grown into a graceless youth whose every act and every word, every day and hour, shredded her love for him. Ungrateful and unloving. He gave no love and wanted none. Christopher needed nothing now, if ever he had needed anything. Bitter enough if the past has been in itself a fulfilment, but when the past was an agglomeration of frustration and quarrels, misunderstandings and continual rejection of anything but skin-deep contact, loss was embittered by a terrible sense of waste.

She would have preferred to bear the first weeks of her grief alone, but Aunt Lilian came to stay with her and, though they were joined by their sorrow, they were divided by Aunt Lilian's silent blame. Each time she met her swimming eyes in reddened puffy lids, she saw reproach because she shed no tears. Christopher's death had dried up the tears in her.

Her grief at the death of her father was aggravated by her awareness that she had made his last years unhappy. Not that he ever said it. He had spoken once only of her relationship with Keith. That was early in the piece, when

rumour carried back to him the news of their affair. After that one occasion when he'd exposed his own honest heart and his rigidly upright mind he went on loving her. She did not see him often, though his letters came, as they had come all her life, bringing to her his new discoveries in the bush, as if they still walked together exploring, watching, listening.

When he died it was as though part of her life was sealed off and she was the poorer for it. It was a quiet pain that went on for a long time, a pain in which was mingled remorse at having hurt him, yet a remorse without any regret for the thing that had hurt him.

She had lived with the quiet heartache of her father's loss; with the angry neuralgia of her son's death. Life without her father and her son had gone on. Without Keith it stopped.

When he had flown back to the Islands that first year she had suffered as she had never suffered for her husband in all the time he had been at the war. Waking and sleeping, day and night, her mind and her heart streamed to him, and her physical self left behind was an empty shell.

She had had no sense of betrayal of husband or child or family. The blaze of her passion burnt out everything else. Her body flowered into a new beauty, her mind awakened to a new and exciting world of which she had had no inkling in her marriage with solid balding, square-jawed Robert Armitage, who had seemed to think of nothing outside his work except his wife and child.

In those years she had, as Aunt Lilian put it, twisted Robert round her little finger, giving him affection and letting him take what he wanted of her—which was little after the bungled honeymoon—caring for his child, keeping his house and entertaining his equally dull friends who came to play bridge on set nights, sending him off to golf on

Saturday afternoons, and on Sundays doing the round of their relatives in the expensive, old-fashioned car he kept in perfect condition.

When the war came he surprised everyone by volunteering, though he was over age. His absence had disrupted her world in a social sense but left her emotionally untouched. Christopher filled her life and Robert faded into the writer of the long, dull weekly letter that injected a sterilized version of war into her unexciting life.

When Keith became her lover she knew she had given Robert nothing—a prostitute would have given him more. She had a brief twinge of regret because now she understood the baffled frown above his eyes during their unhappy honeymoon.

Now, because the publicity limelighting her and Keith was spiced with scandal (‘ Beautiful grass-war widow dancing with war correspondent ’) organizers of charity fashion shows pounced on her. People paid to see her model the clothes which she gave an elegance they would not have on other women. Scandal and art photography enhanced the beauty she already had.

She resented her family’s warnings and criticisms because in her new enchanted world she had lost not only all sense of caution but of the need for caution. Aunt Lilian, who had a glamorized view of marriage since her young man had been killed on Gallipoli a quarter of a century earlier, had warned her that she was throwing up reality for a dream. ‘ It’s not as though he can marry you, even if Robert agrees to a divorce, which I don’t think he will, he being a very religious man. ’

But Robert, though deeply religious, had a strong sense of his dignity as a husband and a figure in finance, and surprised them all by demanding a divorce.

She no longer recognized the reserved man she’d mar-

ried. Robert had come back toughened by his years in the desert. Now, as he sat in his captain's uniform, his sun-tanned hands spread out on the table in front of him, she was shocked to hear him say: 'I am going for a divorce. I shall name Keith Masters as co-respondent and sue him for damages.'

'But Robert, you can't!'

'I can, and I will. You've not only made a laughing-stock of me in front of my friends but you've disgraced my name and our son's name—and your own, for that matter. And since Masters is responsible for it, he shall pay.'

'I never thought you'd be so mercenary.'

'I'm not mercenary. I want justice, that's all. I could have understood your falling in love with a younger man. I wouldn't have blamed you, for God forgive me, I did a dishonourable thing myself, holding up to you at eighteen the bait of a life in Sydney. I knew then you married me not because you loved me, but to get away from the dead-and-alive hole in which you lived, and I was fool enough to think you'd change.

'I'd have let you go, quietly, telling myself I was to blame in the first place. I could live with you though you didn't love me and you never would love me; I couldn't live with you if you loved another man. But you've done it in a way that dragged us all in the mud. What do you think it did to me when I saw the fellows in the mess poring over the photos of you and the famous war correspondent at night-clubs? What do you think it did to Christopher at school?'

'He was too young to understand.'

'A boy's never too young to understand. And if he is, his companions soon let him know that his mother's a harlot.'

'Not that!'



'Then you'll be that before I've finished with you through the Courts. And Masters shall pay.'

They all paid in different currency. Robert got the custody of a sullen child.

'Forget it,' Keith had said that night, kissing away her tears. 'They can't touch us. We've got each other now—for ever.'

It was then that her real marriage had begun, though Keith couldn't marry her legally, for his wife was in a mental hospital to which she had been confined following the death of their first child.

The flat where they set up house together became her home as her legal home had never been. Considering the sum Keith had to pay in damages, enemies and friends alike wondered how he could afford what the fashion-writers called 'a glamour setting for a glamorous woman'. What they didn't know was that Keith had been lucky in doing a favour for an American colonel who transferred the lease to him without key-money and with only a small sum for the elegant, stream-lined furniture. With plate-glass windows framing Mosman Bay and the harbour beyond in their wide sweep, the flat became a model for contemporary living. An abstract mural covered the wall that faced the windows and the changing light constantly drew out fresh colour in its formless riot and even at times gave it significance.

The only old-fashioned thing they possessed was an elegantly carved Georgian double bed that they bought from the sale of an old colonial home. Keith would retort to those who laughed at it by saying that he preferred to blend the best of the old and the new and he'd done it by buying the best of modern mattresses.

The flat had been a perfect frame for the parties they gave for the select people who could always be relied on to

give the news behind the news; whose art pierced a fifth dimension closed to less sensitive minds; whose music abhorred melody and explored dissonances; whose literature disregarded form and content to analyse humanity out of cohesion.

She had always seen herself as an essential part of a pattern of the life they had made together. They dove-tailed socially as they dove-tailed physically, each one an essential and indispensable part of the perfect whole.

Or so she had thought.

She had delighted in her role of hostess, providing exotic food with an infinite variety of drinks, and their guests lavished admiration on her as woman as well as hostess.

With his own dynamism Keith knew how to fuse his guests' differences into momentary harmony, though it was at times the discordant harmony of a symphony of the newest genre that discarded all of music except its notation.

Once, more puzzled than usual about an abstract painting presented to him, she had asked him to explain it. He had laughed: 'A picture hasn't to have form any more than music has or literature or life itself. Each one of them's only a *pointilliste* dot that eventually adds up to an illusion of light or form. Everything's illusion.'

'I don't believe it.'

'Except this.' With one of his swift gestures he blotted out speech with his lips, and blotted out thought with the urgent seeking of his powerful body. In the soaring rapture as his flesh pierced hers she forgot everything but that.

Never in their years together had her urgency failed to match his nor his need her demand. When they were together, that was meaning; that was reality; that was life. Not in itself alone but in what consummation brought in its train. When she came slowly back from the timeless reaches to which his embrace always bore her the sky seemed in-

effably high, the sea immeasurably deep. The trees that rustled green clouds beneath their balcony became a forest with the scimitar leaves sifting the sun into cubist patterns on the salmon smoothness of their curving branches. Sky and sea, trees and wind, made sensuous music together.

Only when he left her had the simple mechanics of sex come to torment her in dreams with their unvarnished physiological crudity.

\* \* \* \* \*

The days and the nights in hospital glided by, one little different from the other. The day was broken by uniformed wraiths who ministered to her. No hint of the truth had appeared in the Press. The newspaper that owned the T.V. station for which she worked had seen to that. Visitors were forbidden at her own request, but notes and flowers poured in. Only Aunt Lilian came, every day, overwhelmingly kind and understanding, knitting, chatting, planning.

At night the sedatives they gave her seemed only to sharpen her senses and she lay sleepless, with her mind exploring the coruscating facets of her past, wondering why she had failed.

In the days of her success money had poured into her as well as flattery. She became international when an American magazine had taken her photo for its cover. She became a household name when the paper for which Keith worked had bought a television station. She was the personification of all that romance-hungry housewives longed for. Sometimes, Keith teased her about it, asking if she ever had a

sneaking doubt that they longed for it only because they were told they should long for it. She denied it. If she had any need for assurance that the things she represented made for happiness her own life gave it to her.

She learned to estimate her points professionally as the specialists did. Mimicking them, Keith would teasingly itemize the things he admired about her in verse that oscillated between satire and obscenity, praising her tiger eyes, her blue-black hair, her slender thighs, her pointed breasts. She used to laugh at his teasing, but never liked it.

She enjoyed her profession and believed in it. Those who invent publicity come to believe their own slogans, Keith had jeered. As a 'quality image' whose glamour sold cosmetics and perfumes and a way of life, she had swallowed them whole.

She had taken a sensuous delight in the hours spent in the fashionable beauty parlour where skilled hands smoothed her already smooth skin with facials and complexion masks; voluptuous pleasure in massage and hand-care and foot-care.

She spent hours each week at the photographic studio modelling the clothes flown from London, Paris and New York, enjoying the adaptation of limbs and face to the garments that she wore. Hours at the T.V. studio preparing and filming the session for the suburban housewife to whom the miniature screen brought escape. Hours with the sponsors and advertising specialists. Hours opening fêtes, compering fashion shows for charity organizations where more went to expenses than to charity.

She got enormous gratification out of the popularity of her Charm Club; satisfaction out of the letters of women who told her what a difference they'd made in their appearance and their homes by following her advice.

If the remorseless years sometimes peered over her



shoulder as she examined herself in the too-honest bathroom mirror, the shadow was gone when Keith's eyes glowed as they looked at her; when they were locked together in the tumultuous frenzy that never lessened, then, for a moment, she was sure of the immortality of beauty and love.

All there life together she was working not only for herself but for him: entertaining the people who would be useful to him, building a social life that was calculated to serve his need to know sophisticated, witty people, influential people who, when the time came, would realize that he was the man for the editorship—his one overwhelming ambition.

She moved in a world of adulation that was yet impersonal since most of the people around her were admirers and flatterers rather than friends. She had no real friends. Keith was jealous of women as well as of men—jealous of anything that distracted her from him. Sometimes even of Jasper.

She never protested. His jealousy flattered her.

All the women envied her Keith's fidelity. In their world, the fidelity of a husband was something to wonder at; the fidelity of a man who was not a husband was little short of a miracle.

The experiences of other women taught her nothing. The infidelity of other women's husbands only heightened her good fortune. If she had ever seen them as part of life's pattern then it was a pattern from which she was miraculously exempt. Some day she knew life would set the seal of security on their love. Some day when the poor crazed creature to whom he was married died, or even earlier if the insanity law was changed. It cast no shadow on her life.

She would have borne his child proudly, challenging the world as she had challenged it when she took his love. Keith would not hear of it.

Sometimes she wondered whether his tragic experience of a mad wife and a still-born child had cauterized all feeling for children in him. Sometimes she thought it was jealousy; that he feared anything that might come between them; that he wanted a child of his own as little as he wanted Christopher.

He hated children. The only shadows that fell across their lives in the early years were the times when she was pregnant. For all his fear of her bearing a child he was careless when passion took him.

'Let us have a child,' she'd pleaded, when it happened the third time. 'This time let's have it.'

His face had darkened. 'No,' he had said, and again, 'No. I don't want children. Ever. Get rid of it. It's easy enough to get rid of it.'

'It's easy enough when you haven't to do it,' she had said bitterly to herself the fifth time when she'd gone to the fashionable clinic whose suave doctor had built up a fortune on just such needs as hers.

But each time it happened she had a sense of frustration. Normally she did not think that she wanted a child. Whatever maternal feeling she had was poured out on Christopher when he was young. However, once life began its work of creation in her she wanted to defend it. The fifth time she came out of the anaesthetic with such rebellion in her that she swore 'Never again'. Never again it was. Keith never asked why or how. When the swift leap of the blood drew them together she was glad she needn't worry.

Now she was left childless and barren. He had destroyed her power to create as ruthlessly as he had taken life from the cat that had too many kittens.

\* \* \* \* \*

She had been with him when the telegram came telling him of the death of his wife, less than two years ago. His face went yellow-grey as he read it. He handed it to her and she read the brief official notice from the mental hospital and handed it back, saying nothing. There was nothing to say. They said nothing, either of them, but that night there had been such a storm of love between them that she had realized how deeply he was shaken.

She hadn't spoken of marriage. She would have thought it petty. She wasn't even sure she wanted marriage then. In some way it seemed a reflection on all they'd had together to go rushing off to regularize what their own love had already sanctified over and over. Nevertheless she had taken it for granted as something desirable in their life that would simplify things when the time came for him to get the editorship.

In the weeks after the wife of his youth had slid inconspicuously out of life he had taken her with the insatiable frenzy of their first days together, with something new in it. Added to his unquestioning demand was something of brutality so that sometimes her body bore on it the marks of his too fierce hands, his lips and his teeth.

It was after such a night that they sat over the breakfast table on the balcony with the jacaranda showering its fragile bells around them and the sea a rippled pool of light under the morning sky. He'd taken a double whisky before his coffee. It surprised her, for though he drank heavily at times she'd never known him to drink before breakfast. He tossed down the double-header and followed it with a cup of strong, black coffee. He was silent but there was nothing strange in that. He was always silent at breakfast. Their life was one of late nights, late risings an hour in the Olympic Pool followed by leisurely breakfasts when other people

were beginning to think about lunch. The morning papers were on the table beside him and he read down the columns with his customary frowning concentration. That, too, was normal.

As she lingered over grapefruit and coffee her eyes carressed his lean face, where the sunshine carved deeper the lines beside his mouth and etched more sharply the network radiating from his eyes. Looking down on the treetops tossing in the breeze she saw in their shifting shadow the pink chalices of the belladonna lilies, the translucent purple of the lasiandra and marvelled at the wonder of the world and her own life. 'If I were a poet,' she said to herself, 'I'd say "My body is like a honeycomb overflowing with honey."' Strange that no poet she knew had ever thought to say that of a loving and beloved woman.

The phone rang and she made a move to answer it but he said: 'I'll go.' He came back and stood in the doorway, taking a cigarette from the packet in his dressing-gown pocket, setting it so that it hung loosely from the corner of his mouth, shaking the cigarette-lighter that refused to light.

She asked nothing. Experience had told her to ask nothing and she would learn.

'McAndrew has had a heart-attack.'

McAndrew was the editor. Neither of them dared say what was in their minds in the face of what might be an old friend's death.

'I have to go down to Melbourne.'

That was the headquarters of the paper. That was where the Big Boss lived. That was where his destiny would be decided.

'I'll catch the two o'clock plane. Better get cracking.' His hand under hers was cold.



She got up and paused a moment to press her lips to his temple in silent understanding.

He moved away and stood leaning against the balcony rail, frowning into the distance, seeing, she knew, neither the sparkling sea nor the windstreaked sky.

She had not seen him again. He had not telephoned. He usually rang her every night when he was away, and when overseas his cables and short, scrawled notes never failed to arrive.

At first she had thought his failure to ring was an indication of the ticklish situation in which he was involved.

Each night she rushed when the phone rang, putting down the receiver with a sinking disappointment when it was some local call, excusing him with the thought that whatever was happening was too delicate even to be breathed into a phone. Each day telegrams came, sometimes two a day: send these . . . send that. Messengers came from the Sydney office to despatch whatever it was he required.

Still he had not rung her, then or later, though his cryptic telegrams continued to come and her letters to flow to him. She comforted herself that their own code, devised over the years, a childish code conveying their limitless love, had made each brief message personal.

She watched the papers day by day for bulletins of McAndrew's health. She rang his wife, conveying her sympathy with a twinge of guilt.

'I don't really wish him any harm,' she told herself, because what she wanted for Keith could come only through hurt to McAndrew. She pushed the thought from her mind, remembering Aunt Lilian's superstition that 'The harm you wish anyone will come back on you'. She exorcized her guilt by being specially kind to dowdy little

Mrs McAndrew, for whom she'd never really had any time, finding her dull, suburban home too sharp a reminder of the world she had left for Keith.

Without him beside her she woke when the first rollicking call of the kookaburras snatched her out of a light sleep. She would take Jasper his favourite walk to the Point, walking lightheadedly through mid-summer mornings where the high blue sky was mirrored in the blue bay, where the blue-tipped flames of bird of paradise flowers glowed in the Reserve gardens, morning glories rippled their sea-blue bells across shadowed rocks, and blue wrens flashed like sapphires in the sunshine.

Jasper would race after seagulls, bark hysterically along the rocks, and come back to sit watching her as she breakfasted, with his head cocked on one side and his eyes twinkling through his silky fringe.

As the weeks crawled by with no word from Keith the need to hear his voice mounted. This was a mutual need binding them over the years and the distance so that they found themselves time and again making frantic efforts to contact each other, efforts coinciding in so strange a way that they had christened the feeling 'Old Telep'.

She timed the trunk call to the hour at which he usually called her, knowing that then for a few minutes he was sitting relaxed in his office after the first edition had gone to press. She knew how he would look: tie askew, shirt-sleeves rolled up, a cigarette between his fingers as he gulped a black coffee. She had booked the call early, giving her name so there would be no doubt.

His secretary's cool voice came to her, close as though it was in the next room. Its coolness changed to gush as she said: 'Oh dear, I'm so sorry, Mrs Caxton, but Mr Masters had to go out.'

Telepathy told her it was a lie before the girl had finished speaking, but when next morning's paper carried the news of McAndrew's death she had thought that perhaps for once 'Old Telep.' was mistaken.

A week later the paper carried a formal notification of the appointment of Mr Keith Masters as editor of *The Globe*. She wept with joy as she read it over her breakfast tray.

None of their journalistic friends rang to congratulate her: none of the acquaintances who frequented their parties. Jealousy, she thought. Only the news editor of the T.V. station had stopped to comment on Keith's appointment, adding with a lift of his bristling eyebrows: 'Well, he's got what he wanted. Let's hope he'll like it. I hear he's coming up to chair the news panel tomorrow night.'

She went home on air. His silence, the inexplicable breaking of their habits when apart—all were swept aside. He was coming back to her with the one thing he'd coveted all his life, editorship of the chain's most important daily, safe at last in his hands.

She ordered the food he preferred. bought the flowers he liked, prepared herself as a bride might prepare herself.

She slept lightly and sweetly as though he was already beside her. She wakened early and went with her breakfast tray and the morning paper to the balcony. She flipped over the pages, uninterested in war and revolutions and super-bombs and sputniks, and turned to the pages where homelier things of local gossip retailed the world she knew. There, in an inconspicuous corner under 'Quiet Wedding', she read the unadorned report of the marriage of Keith Masters to Elspeth, only daughter of Mr Mark Robertson.

She would have thought it was one of those monstrous errors that is the horror of every newspaper editor. She

wouldn't have believed it, only that Elspeth was the crippled daughter of the proprietor of the newspaper of which Keith had been made editor.

\* \* \* \* \*

The T.V. station sent her abroad on a tour that was an extravagant phantasmagoria of fashion and elegance—England, Europe, the United States. Only sometimes she wondered in the gap between feverish activity and drugged sleep whether Keith in his role of editor had not worked on that mysterious board of directors to have her sent away so that his honeymoon would be untainted by the thought of her lying alone in their bed. It was then she took to tranquillizers, finding that she could not sleep without them, yet hating the dreamless sleep that they gave.

'You'll never get old,' Keith had said to her that last day together when he had taken her with brutal and unexpected urgency. Then, looking down on her face on the pillow, he'd traced the lines she had not yet seen beside her eyes and said: 'But your skin will. Close up like this I can see the beginning of lines here.' He'd run his finger around her throat: 'And here. And I believe your jawline's beginning to sag.'

Her mirror had told her he was right. So she had gone to a famous clinic in Switzerland with a world-renowned plastic surgeon, paid an extortionate sum and come out with her contours restored, her incipient crow's feet erased and a stranger's face looking back at her from the mirror.

In the days after the operation, as she lay in the darkened

room, she wondered why, with all modern miracles, they had not yet found a plastic surgeon of the soul.

The three months circling the globe involved her in so exhausting a round that she hardly knew her own desolation till she stepped once more into the flat with only Jasper and Aunt Lilian to welcome her, and realized that henceforth desolation was her existence.

Her life went on in the same way. She lay on the massage table and sat in the hairdresser's chair; relaxed under the beautician's skilled hands. Her face kept its contours, her skin its elasticity, her body its firmness, her hair its glistening abundance; but within she was hollow, hollow, hollow. What she needed now was not beauty culture but something that would give a meaning to living and a reason to live.

The hours in her flat were the worst, but she could think of no alternative. She could sell the furniture and move; it would be less expensive though as yet she had not begun to think of money as a problem.

With Keith's going the old social life had fallen away and she was faced with the emptiness of her illusion that she was a part of it. She received hospitality and returned it, but no longer at home, preferring to take her acquaintances to fashionable restaurants where there was always a cameraman to record her comings; where the manager and head waiter greeted her fulsomely because Tempe Caxton's presence meant publicity and therefore business.

Saturday nights exposed her manlessness. In her set no woman who valued her reputation as happy and successful dared to go dining alone or with another manless woman. To go alone or with a woman-friend to the theatre was to advertise failure. She found herself accepting invitations from men who bored her.

When she woke from her drugged sleep to the raucous

jollity of the kookaburras the flat reverberated round her like an empty shell.

Memory whipped her with cat-o'-nine-tails, for though every material possession of Keith had gone, the floor echoed to his ghostly footsteps, the bed was haunted by his presence, his loughboy exuded masculinity—there was no escape from him anywhere.

Lying half-awake in the early morning with the world waking around her, currawongs dropping their bell-like calls among the trees, bulbuls chattering among the berries, the seagulls' insistent high mewing chorus accompanying the thunder of the first ferry shaking the silence as it drew into the wharf, she would grope across the bed, unwilling to believe that she would find it empty. The slow tears would trickle from under her lids and she would feel them run down across her temples to her ears as she lay with her eyes shut against the light.

Then her body would burn with need of his and she would turn and bury her face in the pillow and bite into it to keep herself from crying aloud and lie tense in her desire until the sterile tumult of her body subsided and her heart thudded once more to normality.

The sun beat mercilessly in through the wide windows, and the harbour without glittered with too brilliant light. She soaked herself too long in perfumed water with the tears running heedlessly over her creamed face.

She tried to read, but nothing described the depths of her loneliness. Women writers, whether they were poets or novelists, were perhaps ashamed to describe the utter disruption of their lives when a man left them. Or perhaps they didn't know. Perhaps their own particular talent protected them against the corrosion of loss and the erosion of failure.

The glamour that had invested her work peeled off. Now

when the cameras focused on her she used all her art to make her poses seem artless, self-consciously modulated her voice. Now the commercials that previously had not seemed vulgar inducements to buy but honeyed confidences from one woman to another ground harshly in her ears. She began to feel the monstrous insincerity behind her serene brow, calm eyes and smiling lips saying: 'You owe a duty to yourself and your husband to keep your body beautiful, your hair glossy and your skin like a peach. You owe a duty not only to your home and your family but to your neighbours to see that your clothes do all they can to give your personality a fitting frame.' And the worm in her brain made its own ironic commentary: how could she tell that unknown woman how to keep her man when she couldn't keep her own?

She no longer tossed to her secretary the letters that flowed in each day. Instead she read each one, trying to translate the clumsy phrases of women no longer girls asking for advice how to retain their looks, when what they really wanted was assurance that at forty life was not over.

She began to fear the emptiness of women's lives and to tremble with them where once she had laughed at their pathetic effusions. The insecurity of this circle of invisible fans of which she had always been complacently proud began to pierce her own armour. She began to wonder as she had never wondered before what there was for women when the perpetual business of home-making had left no traces except the house that would be theirs in thirty years, the furniture on Hire Purchase, husbands who began to look at them as part of the furnishings and children whose growing interests they had failed to share because they were too busy with panaceas for the ravages of the years.

On bus and ferry she wondered what lay behind the painted masks women turned on the world; what went

on beneath the gilded and hennaed and platinumed casques they piled on their heads? What secret worries burned up the bodies concealed by the smart shift or the well-cut suit? What did their well-kept hands do when they had placed the lid on the typewriter, or closed the desks or covered the goods piled on never-empty counters or pulled the venetians in salons or rung up their last sale on cash registers? What inexpensive flats and bed-sitters and single rooms did they tread preparing their lonely dinners when they had kicked off their shoes and relaxed to the momentary anguish of stabbing corns and fallen arches?

What would happen if she fell ill and could not earn? She had little put by and everything about her way of living was too expensive for an independent woman.

A new realization was dawning on her since money had ceased to be the thing by which she amused herself and became the means by which she lived: how did women meet the bills that mounted at the end of the week?

Watching their mask-like faces she would ask: for how many or how few of them were the irritations of the day smoothed out by a man's kisses and the companionship which is fulfilment in itself? For how many of them did the running of the evening bath automatically release the tears always waiting, in perpetual awareness that the only fate that is worse than death is to be alone.

And all the time she moved in a coil of self-insulation caught up in an endless silent dialogue with Keith in which she argued her case with a shameless retailing of the qualities he had desired in her and must still desire.

\* \* \* \* \*



Reality shed the insulation the day the manager of the T.V. station left a note asking her to see him.

She went to his office without any premonition—she was not gifted like Aunt Lilian! Even when she found there one of the leading sponsors and the head of the photographic studio she did not anticipate disaster.

Disaster was waiting. Smiling, apologetic, sympathetic, friendly, but disaster none the less.

They began with delicate hypocrisy. They admired her just as much as ever and were appreciative of the work she had done for them, but—but—Perhaps she had noticed that the camera was seeing what her friends and admirers had not seen? No? Perhaps she had not studied the films of her recent shows? Perhaps she would like to see the reels with them?

She said yes though she prayed silently: 'Oh God, spare me!'

Nobody on earth or in heaven spared her anything. She would have liked to close her eyes as the films, one after another, went across the small screen. Self-loathing such as she had never experienced swept through her as she saw herself smile and pose and prattle platitudes. Overweight? Underweight? Incipient wrinkles? Tell-tale grey hair? Give the time that is left over from the housework to fighting back time. Save money from the housekeeping for beauty culture and clothes.

Beneath her words she was saying: 'Even if beauty is timeless it can't save you. It wasn't beauty that took Keith from me.'

They looked at her knowingly: 'It's not that you photograph less well or that you are less glamorous,' they lied. 'Indeed you're more so since you had your trip abroad.'

She felt the flush run over the nearly invisible scar fol-

lowing her hair line and the normal wrinkle at the base of her throat. She had given her practised laugh in company with them.

‘As a matter of fact, you’re too perfect,’ they said. ‘The last five years have brought a new kind of woman. Your kind of glamour’s out, so now we think we’ll put on a younger wench for this new type.’

‘Mind you,’ they assured her, ‘we think there’s a whole new field waiting to be opened up for middle-aged women. After all, they have the money and the leisure and—and well, let us be frank, a greater need of *couturiers* and *coiffeurs* and cosmeticians and all the charm paraphernalia you’ve always so successfully demonstrated. But it’s not for us. On sound maybe? You should have no trouble in finding a sponsor.’

She hoped that she met their suggestions and their comments with the same delicacy as they offered them.

They parted smilingly with the old jargon of: ‘Darling, you still look wonderful;’ and a jocular: ‘There’s quite a fan-mail that you haven’t collected lately. You see, they’re still faithful.’

\* \* \* \* \*

That evening, going home on the ferry she read the announcement of the birth of Keith’s twins.

Then she knew to its last bitter dregs the cruelty of life that doomed women to barren middle age while their lovers fathered children on younger women.

The little single-deck ferry ploughed through a sea of unpolished steel; a steely sea under a steely sky. No lights lit up the foreshore, for the invisible sun had not set. A grey world, swathed in a grey haze. Grey women going home with grey fatigue on their faces.

They rounded Cremorne Point where the harbour lighthouse jewelled the dusk with its first emerald flash and the foreshore lights answered with golden garlands. The sky lowered more threateningly and the sea growled sullenly in the presage of storm. By the time she got off at the Old Wharf it had begun to an ominous overture of gusts out of the south. Void of hope she climbed the steps to a flat empty except for Jasper.

It was then she decided to die.

\* \* \* \* \*

The nurses who moved round her by day were only substantial ghosts. At night unsubstantial ghosts more real than the living came to haunt her. Her father's eyes looked at her full of love and incomprehension. Christopher stared at her out of a face frighteningly like her own. She couldn't read the expression in his eyes any more than when he was alive but she knew that there was neither love nor forgiveness in them. Shadowy as the dead, Keith prowled whenever her mind sank beneath the horizon of sleep, jolting her to wakefulness. Even a dream-world in which he persisted was unbearable.

She wondered, as she lay thinking back on her life, how people lived with nothing and no one to live for. If only Christopher had been left to her she would have

poured out on him the riches she had thrown away on Keith.

\* \* \* \* \*

As she lay sleepless, the life she had lived for twenty years flowed before her like the skating rink at Kosciusko—dazzling, full of colour, with floodlights blotting out the stars in the dark sky and the skaters weaving varicoloured patterns on the frozen lake, with no thought of the lake waters below. Once the ice cracked and a young girl died in the icy water. They never found her body.

Often in dreams she saw the lovely creature frozen in unplumbed icy depths just as sometimes she saw Christopher floating, undiscovered, in some jungle pool.

She would wake, suffocating with remorse—and lie, coming slowly back to the realization that there had been no other course to take. The inevitability of her choice then only deepened her anguish now. An anguish so far beyond the relief of tears that there was no balm for its corroding pain.

Christopher was dead. She pushed back the torturing thought that if she had behaved differently he would not have been sent to Malaya with his unit. No use to offer herself the comfort that she had done it for his own good. No use to tell herself that she had not really known she was sending him to danger when she had supported his father's decision to have him sent there. Faced with the situation again she would have done it again. The alternative was unthinkable.

What else could they have done with their changed son?

The shy, silent boy was gone and in his place someone she didn't recognize. She'd never in his whole life heard him speak nor seen him act as he did. Up till then his only means of opposition had been to dig in his heels in silent refusal to do anything he didn't want to do. This was different. This was the strength of madness given by an infatuation—the witchcraft of sex working on a boy who had been too rigidly protected from the experiences that boys of his age took for granted. She blamed his father for that. She and Keith at least had tried to show him what normal living was, but his father had kept him in a hot-house atmosphere of Sunday morning church and Sunday school, school cadets and all the old-fashioned paraphernalia with which Robert bolstered up his life.

\* \* \* \* \*

She woke to another day that she hated for its brightness. Today she must decide what she was going to do. She could no longer lie there using a fantasy illness as an excuse to avoid facing life again. She pushed the letters aside unopened and gazed without interest at a packet the nurse held out.

'Come on,' she said, in her brisk young voice 'Open this one up. If you don't do it, I'm going to.'

She cut the string, slipped off the wrapping and handed her a notebook with 'Diary' embossed in gold on its leather cover.

When Tempe opened it the name leapt out at her in sprawling schoolboyish writing. 'Christopher Robert Armitage.' Inside the cover in Aunt Lilian's graceful back-

hand script was written: 'To dearest Christopher on his eighteenth birthday.'

The book burned in her hand. She put it down trembling as though Christopher's ghost with all its unloving bitterness had materialized in the room.

Startled, the nurse looked at her, turned and went out.

Her nerves quietened, she gulped the nearly scalding tea the nurse brought back, opened the diary and read.



## PART TWO

JANUARY 16. 'Here beginneth the diary of Christopher Robert Armitage who today celebrateth the eighteenth anniversary of his regretted berth. Amen.

Dear Diary . . . My limited experience of recording the story of my life leads me to beleave that is the corect opening though why I should feel any afECTION for this unsullied page in this unspotted book I cannot conceave except that Aunt Lilian gave it to me. Who else among my near and not-so-dear would have such a brainwave to releave the boardom of my six week's quarantene? Isn't it just tipical of my luck that I get a Scarlet Feaver wog in the long Vac when earlier it could have saved me six weeks of that miner hell they call school.

Only Aunt Lilian (she' really my greatAunt) would think that maybe I—who has to be kicked into writing a letter—would like to start a diary. Tipical of her role in life that it's only here that I think to make special thanks to her for everything she's done for me all my life. Funny, Aunt L.'s the only person I ever open up to apart from a Temporary Maths Teacher I once had (I call him T.T.) who introduced me to the one thing I'm interested in—Mathematics. When I'm with him my mind lights up like an electric light bulb. With Aunt L. I babbel away as though it's just a continuation of my babbeling to her when she looked after me in the early days of my Mother's Great Romance

and my Father's absence at the Second-World-War-to-end-all-Wars.

I won't say I love Aunt L. I avoid writing love as I avoid thinking love. I hate the word. Luv, and duv and moon and Joon. Corny, phony. Luv is the thing that made the sourpuss who is my Legal Begetter (henceforward Legal in this diary) the arrogant wolf who is my Step-Father (courtesy title only) and the bee-ootiful satellite who is my Maternal Parent (henceforth Ma).

There's no greater condemnation of my parents than that they excluded Aunt Lilian from their lives—and mine. Why couldn't my father have taken her as housekeeper? When my Grandfather died (what a man he was!) I used to beg him to let her come and look after us—I was too young then to try and hide how miserable I was. But he refused pig-headedly each time I asked him. He has the reputation for being a hard man but just. He doesn't deserve it. It wasn't justice to condemn me to grow up in a house run by Duty with a capital D.

Aunt Lilian could have warmed it. But she came not to us who needed her, nor to my mother who owed it to her, but to a bedsitter where she supplemented her Old Age Pension with baby-sitting and knitting.

If there's no other monument to her let me print it here: TO AUNT LILIAN WHO SIRVED THE WHOLE UNWERTHY WORLD AND FOR WHOM HER GREAT-NEFEW NEARLY WROTE THE WORD 'LOVE'.

\* \* \* \* \*

Slight digresion. In case you don't like my literary style,



Dear Diary, let me explane—since there'll be no secrets between us—that it has been developed over the years to infuriate my Step, a near Basic-English addict who would never use a two-sillabled word if there were enough four letter Anglo-Saxon ones (NOT of the Lady Chat. sort for the Pure Press!) to get his punches over.

My long-winded deklamations also madden my teachers, and my school mate contemperies are stunned with reluctant admiration because I refuse to lard my speech with the loose local idiotism that renders their language practically uninteligible unless you're in the same clique. I collect words as other chaps collect photos of film stars and I've developed my own stile which, combined with my originel spelling, has been known to bring Inglish teachers to the virge of a stroak.

To return to my moutons as the French don't say.

When you consider the contradictions of my upbringing it's a wonder I'm not a Scizof—Skizop—Schiz—Sorry D.D. Must look it up, but it sounds like 'Skitso freenic' and means you're split in half inside.

I've always lived a split-kind of life. Always pulled two ways, like once when I was under water fishing I was caught between two urrents. A queer, frightening feeling.

My childhood—now ofically over—was ground between the upper and neather mills/ones of alternate week' ends in Legal's too-big, old-fashioned house, and in my Ma's and Step's too-modern flat.

I'm certain Ma and Legal fought for my fortnightly visits more to spite each other than out of afection for me, each trying to prove that he/she would have been the Perfect Parent if he/she hadn't been frustrated by her/him.

Aunt L. says I ought to be sorry for Legal. How can you be sorry for a cove who lives in a kind of mental uniform,

fighting the wars over again with blokes who have made a profession of being returned soldiers?

He's the perfect Square.

He never refers to my mother as anything but 'Mrs Caxton' so that he is always tearing the raw skin off me and—it has suddenly struck me!—himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

After Ma's scandal had exploded in Sydney like an atomic bomb leaving radioactive partikles everywhere—particularly on me—I'd have had something like a home if he'd let Aunt Lilian come and housekeep for us. But no, when I was nine he sent me off as a weekly-border to one of the Best Private Schools instead of to the Public School in our suburb where I liked it and nobody cared who my mother was. And there I was for the rest of my life: the radioactive kid; and everybody had their Geiger detectors on me.

Behind it all I have a shrewd idea that what Legal really wanted was to make sure that I was matey with the sons of the Best People because somewhere in the dim future my prospects might depend on one of their fathers all of whom have a lot of money.

He always talks about people being 'worth' so many thousands when as human beings they wouldn't bring Aunt L's favorite tuppenny-dump.

Further causes of my split personality are that my Legal and the School are always drumming into us 'For God and Queen'—they sometimes even so far forget Modern History as to say 'Empire'—and they're all ready to pull out a

Union Jack at any tick of the clock. Legal won't even have a T.V. set in the house because he says he's not going to pay money to have American muck pouring into his home to corrupt his puah son. When I said that I reckoned some of the British programmes were just as corrupting he got mad and called me disloyal.

At my Ma's the waves come at me from the other direction. My Step's newspaper is all for 'Let's look to America', the clothes my mother models are American clothes and the Way of Life she peddles over the T.V. is the American way of life and the food we eat (damn good, too) and the parties she gives are on the American plan: super 'does' at the flat and whacking barbecues down at Step's weekender at Pittwater. So I just carry my Japanese transistor round (early gift of Step's) and listen to folk-songs from all over the world—the only programmes worth listening to.

This important occasion in my undistinguished career has brought me a number of presents which should be recorded here.

No. 1. Cheque for five hundred pounds from Legal paid into my account and duly presented in a brand-new bank book as though my advanced age now qualifies me henceforth to dispense more wisely than I had before the largess poured out on me (i.e. One miserable quid a week pocket-money).

No. 2. A super underwater swimming-suit from my Ma whether out of the natural lavishness of her loving (?) heart or the guilt I sometimes smell as Hamlet did with his mother—who knows?

No. 3. A natty Japanese camera from my Step. It's attractive form and technical efficiency is in no way lessened in my mind by the suspicion that he picked it up cheap in Hong Kong. I have often sensed in his fillibustering

generosity something of the man who likes to pick things up cheep.

Well, dear Diary, this seems to be the appropriate date to ask: what have my eighteen years given me?

I imagine if I took a census of opinions from all those concerned with molding my Mind and Character, I'd get 99 per cent agreement on my Unprepossessing Appearance even with pimples now in abscentia, and the Unlovability of my nature.

Let me put down here a Personality assesment as I imagine it would come out if I boiled down all the opinions that have been freely and uninvitedly poured upon me.

Katalog: Item 1. *Apearance*: string bean, gangling, clumsy. Feet too big, body too thin. Shoulders stooped—from stubbornness not studiousness. Hair ratty rather than mousy with a refusal to stay where it's put unless dawbed with one of Ma's expencive glews which I dutifully refuse to apply. Eyes that remind me of Ma's Sydney Silky terrier Jasper, though the expression is less amiable.

Aunt L. says both hair and eyes are like my father's when he was young but since my only memories are of him bald with a graying rim and I don't ever remember seeing his eyes except covered with thick lenzed glasses neither phisically nor in anything else do I see any of Legal's genes or kromosomes conveyed by the sperm that hit the ovum that became me. He's got the kind of Jehovah-look about him, minus the beard, of the old bloke in a nightie sitting on a cloud in Aunt Lilian's illustrated Bible. Maybe that's why we've never got close to each other. It's not only that he belongs to my Grandfather's generation. I was close to my Grandfather and I think the happiest times I ever spent were with him and Aunt Lilian when my mother ran off with Her Great Love and my father hadn't yet come back from the war. I didn't know I was happy then because I

missed my mother and used even to cry about her. But I *was* happy. My Grandfather wanted me and Aunt Lilian wanted me. Maybe they spoiled me. My father said they did, but if that's spoiling then I'm all in favour of it. If you don't want kids to grow up with a vacuum in their inside where their hearts should be you've got to make them feel that you want them more than anything else, and neither my Ma nor my Pa ever wanted me except to irritate each other. She loves nobody but Step and herself. He loves nobody. He would have sold me for a bunch of shares in a rocket factory. She would have swapped me for a Beauty cure guaranteed to keep her Body Beautiful and her Face fotogenic. Beauty! How I hate the word! She peddles it like any other tart peddling her what-have-you at King's Cross—though she's getting old and ought to know better.

\* \* \* \* \*

'No! No! No!' Tempa threw the diary from her. 'It isn't true. Oh, Chris!'

She lay back, shaken that she had known so little of the son she had thought of as quiet, innocent, unsophisticated.

So that's how he saw her: like any other tart! 'How could you be so cruel to me?' she whispered. And his echo came: 'How could you be so cruel to me?'

His contempt made her see, as though in a distorted T.V. film, the things that had made up her life. She heard his voice:

'Beauty! How I hate the word!'

'I hate it, too, Chris—now.'

Yet what could he know of its joy or its sorrow? Beauty which, as the years went by, became not a banner to be shaken lightly in the dawn of every new day but a burden to be assumed. Beauty that went from a burden to blackmail as each year added to your dressing table newer and better and more expensive unguents; that poured into your baths mysterious lotions that would bring back the bloom of youth; that held a rigid hand over your diet; that made the bathroom scales the arbiter of your taste. That made of your laugh and your smile a calculated thing lest they carve deeper the line from nostril to upper lip, set the creeping cobwebs round your eyes.

She wanted to scream out: 'No, no, no!' but she had no argument and reluctantly conceded: 'You're right, Chris—but not all right. I fooled myself I was doing something useful. And in selling it, I forgot that sex had a short life. Now I'm out-of-date. I peddled sex subtly. The day for subtlety is over.'

Keith used to laugh when she told him about the sessions she had with the advertisers with their talk of psychological conditioning to prepare people to buy something they didn't want.

'Funny how we complain about other peoples' brain-washing,' he said. 'You brain-wash them to want muck just as the papers do. We're just two separate branches of the same racket.'

Deep down she hadn't felt it a racket, manipulating women's desires so that they bought things they could not afford because she hypnotized them into the belief that with it they were buying emotional security.

'No! It's not true, Christopher, that I sold myself for this alone. I did it because I thought keeping beauty was the way to keep love,' she protested again. 'And I wanted you. I wanted you for yourself. I loved you but you re-

jected me. If I failed you, Chris, I failed myself as well.’  
She picked up the book.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Diary: The English master who described digression as my major sin was right. Lead on Macduff and greet the unanalysed with a sneer.

*Katalog: Item 2. Mind:* bright, brainy, quick of comprehension but slow of study. Ah, there’s the rub. Hence I was unloved by my teachers and disliked by my school-mates for the prize I always won for Maths and my failures in other subjects. The Maths prize was frowned on by older representatives of the Wack and Wallah school as a bad example to Character Building since Nature had endowed me with a talent that allowed me to Win without Working. ‘Achievement without effort,’ said the Head, ‘is not what we aim for, Armitage.’

If this is the case why should my Legal’s reputation as a Financier get him a lofty position on the School Bord since money does the work for him and he contributes nothing to the world but Kaos and Krisis? (I quote T.T.)

Item 3: *Character:* None, or since we study the Classics, Nil. Period. Full stop. Large query???

Maybe they’re right and maybe they’re wrong. I don’t know, because I don’t know what Character is. If it’s lick-spitting teachers’ boots or brow-beating juniors or sikofanting the School Bord or learning to leer at ladies over the lemon-squash at the monthly get-togethers, I haven’t it. If it’s dedicating my leshure to the School cadets, I haven’t got it. If it s donating my Geniass to an institution like the

one my Legal has in store for me, I haven't got it either. Regreably, Dear D., we repeat: Character Nil.

I've never liked my School. The Ideas that motor it are not merely pre-Einstein, but pre-Galileo. Our morals—we are told—should be monkish not monkeyish, though the world around us encourages us to the latter rather than the former.

Manners inculcated: Victorian. We are told our behaviour should be that of gentlemen though we don't really have much idea of what a gentleman is except that he has a status-simbol house and a £2000 car. In our sub-world it hightens your presteege if you own a car as early as possible. Legal wouldn't let me have one. Karakter, you know!

Our headmaster's solemn words of advice on seeking a career that will not only 'Give you Satisfaction but Contribute something to the Community' are wasted on clots only litterate enough to read the Business Man's Bible—the Positions vacant advertisements in the newspapers which appeal to those on the Threshold of Manhood. 'Are you making fifty pounds a week? Join us and double it.' And for that all you need is a Good appearance, a pleasing manner and HIDE.

As I haven't any of these, the temptation leaves me untouched. Jealousy of course!

But no, D.D., I don't want that kind of life. When we had to write an essay about our ambitions, nobody but Withers the Swot wrote that they wanted to do a hard, exciting job. Noone wanted to be a scientist or explorer or a sailor. The only difference in their ambitions was the road they took to BEING AN EXECUTIVE AT THIRTY. Executive of what? No one cared so long as it brought in £5000 a year. I said I wanted to be a Top Executive on a Sanitary Cart because I like night-work, the open air, there's no



danger of unemployment and it's an Essential Service Keeping the Kommunity Kleen.

What a stink that caused! (Sorry dear D. I won't do that again. It's too tipically Teenagerish and that's one thing I'm NOT.)

I once spent a week-end at my Ma's listening to penetrating percerations on Teenagers, made by pundits of the lower-paid regions of literary criticism and I heard them take teenage heroes in books and plays and films apart limb by limb, artery by artery, mussle by mussle, gangleon by gangleon, cerebrel convolushion by convolushion to see how they ticked and why. Oh, they were profound, those blokes, a kind of metasychical profundity perpetually lost in the fog of their own fabulations. But penetration and profundity, all thrown in, they hadn't a clew about téenagers. Most of us are just one big exposed nerve. The Coral polyp has a good idea. If your nerves are too tender build a Kalkareous cover even if it kills you. Actually most of the crazy, mucked-up kids today are the tipe that ten years on will be joining the Old Boy's Union and singing old-school songs to protect them from the terrors of being forty, and in another twenty years on, having become Church wardens, will be telling their grandsons how their schooldays were the best days of there lives. That kind never see that the only way to get over teenage troubles is to grow out of them.

These are the kids I've got to live with and work with and if I'm unlucky, play with. Most are mindless mugwumps, torn by the temptation to tup and prevented from doing so by various reasons, though some of the blokes in my class have been going steady with wenches since they were thirteen. Guess what they don't know about the sex life of the amoeba isn't worth knowing.

Ah, do I hear your ears flapping, D.D.?

What do I know about Sex? you're going to ask me. . . .

I'm always cross-questioned about this in a high-minded fashion by my Legal. He solemnly told me the Facts of Life years after I'd already learnt them. I kept a dead-pan and listened and practically twisted myself into a knotted bowel trying not to let him see me laughing. He'd like to know what I know.

No feeelthy curiosity, you understand; just to ensure himself that I'm not being corrupted by the society of my mother's unconventional friends. I take it all dead-pan wondering how any intelligent man (because he's intelligent in his own way though not the kind I appreciate) can be so dum as to think anybody who goes through one of the Best Schools has anything new to learn about corruption either in Foot-ball skrumms or Private Pash parties, those great builders of Karakter.

So, Dear D. let me initiate you to some of our Teenage mysteries. I'm lowthed by the bordy bulls of my co-class-mates who brighten the hours with reports of their sexual exploits. Since I contribute nothing I am considered a louse and a stinker. No one will beleave that with the oportunities that I have to penetrate into that sofisticated world of which my Ma is a star and my Step a planet that I haven't tales to retale which would make pale those of Hip and diminish Kleopatra's caresses to clumsy kisses from local sex-kittens.

Ma's reputation puts me in the sofisticat class, and I'm always being asked to tell them some of the dirt that goes on in my week-ends at her flat. Actually they do little else but talk and guzzel. There's more conversation per square foot than anywhere else except in a monkey-pit. And what ideas! None of them seems to beleave in anything they do. I early gave up placing any faith in newspapers when I found out that the brilliant darlings of the public press I

meet at Ma's who make the air sparkel with their witticisms and their skepticisms and they synicisms write in their columns what they were told to write. Hurrah for the Free Press! I could puke when I read Step's newspaper articles and find him supporting in his cattle-prodder stile his Boss's ideas with which in private he disagrees.

One complaint every oldie makes about me is that I have no confidence in myself. BOLONEY! I have no confidence in THEM—any of Them!

To our muttons. Here let me confide to you the Code of Behavior that Young Gentlemen of the North Shore (Uppah as well as Lowah) have invented to guide them though the jungel of Teenage Sex-life. A System of Numbers (One to Fourteen) gives you the clew to the amount of pashing a vergin or near vergin permits and expects. Saves time. No waste of brainpower in finding words to put the acid on them. Just 'One or eleven?' If she says, 'One', you're done. If 'Eleven', your near heaven.

My lordly disregard of the numbers system (Mushing not Mathematics) by which the degree of familiarity with a kitten-Kleo is estimated, is taken to imply that I am uninterested in the technique of applying Four or Seven or even Thirteen, because I already know the orjiastic ekstacy that abideth in Fourteen.

I don't, of course, Dear Diary. Let me abace myself before you since this will be between you and me alone. I've never kissed a girl. I've never fumbled with her in the front seat or back seat of a bomb. I've never tried her out with a kiss at Three and kuddle at Eight. undone buttons at Eleven, and unzipped zippers at Thirteen. My aloofness when these are discussed, the lift of my eyebrows (Pa's), the scornful tilt of my mouth (Ma's), makes my bordy contemporaries take contempt for sophistication.

I get many invitations to private parties because other

fellows' fathers think my father will be useful to them over their investments and overdrafts. Legal thinks it's just cussedness on my part that I don't want to go. I'm just not a party type. The only place I liked going to was Withers—he's mad on Astronomy which—like Mathematics—is free from the revolting mush of emotions. When you can get Withers talking he brings the world of Outer Space whizzing round your feet. They asked me home a few times and it was an exciting house. Everybody throwing off sparks. W. Senior is Professor in Physical Science, the dorter doing Med. and Mrs W. president of an anti-nuklear bomb test Committee because she wants to make sure her kids have a LIFE ahead of them. My Ma couldn't care less. Why doesn't she sometimes think of something really important instead of useless fiddel-faddels? At the Withers's it's all terribly high-brow but fun in an odd kind of way. And terribly loving to each other, some of which splashed over on me. I'd never been in this kind of family before. There must have been some of them at school, but that kind didn't ask me home and Withers stopped asking me when I didn't ask him back to our Tomb.

Though my father was on the School Board he didn't have any real friends except at the R.S.I.L. Club and those blokes are interested only in living the battles of the last war and the war before that, though by now—so Step says—they've apparently forgotten who they fought with and against.

The last pash party I went to, and I mean the last, for after that I let Legal accept, and just didn't arrive. Since the lights go out half an hour or so after most parties begin, who's to say whether I am there or not? I'm always saving up that to tell him that if anybody splits on me.

Holy Newton! was I bored the last time I let him blackmail me into going to a private party at the kind of big

house the papers advertise as suitable for 'a Top executive'. I came without a girl and though you've got your pick of sex-kittens it's really pretty limited except for the gate-crashers who usually roar round in souped-up cars, but they're generally toughs and us lesser toughs usually give them as wide a birth as they'll let you in case they bung on a blue. But even gate-crashers keep to the convention of only the Best People from the same clutter of schools—cock and hen. You're done if you go outside them. This being a democratic country, us blokes don't mix with 'em State Schoolers though They get better exam results and at times beat us at football and rowing.

But back to our p.p.

The oldies welcomed us, if you could call welcoming us shouting 'Hello' from the stairs as they were rushing about in T. shirts and tight pants getting ready to go to a party of their own. I never know whether this kind of parent is terribly broad-minded, terribly innocent or terribly anxious to have no responsibility for what happens in their house.

Anyway, till they went, the Rabbel stood around tossing the ball of conversation—nothing over two silabels—and getting bogged down after the third return. They look as though they've stepped out of any Yankee Teenage T.V. show. Funny, only for the hair you often wouldn't be able to tell the sexes. That's wrong; the bumps help, too.

When the oldies blew out, somebody poured a bottle of gin into the fruit cup, out came bottles of sherry and everyone hogged in.

By this time the cushions were already on the floor, and the pairing off was done quickly. I'm a dead loss as a pairer. I can never make up my mind about a girl and I haven't got the looks or the personality to attract any but the dumbest. Most other girls I'd got paired off with before by accident were as nervous as I was and so we just lolled

around slushing a bit and not liking it and they were as glad as I was that I didn't try to go through.

This night was the exception. Our absent hosts' neace from a swish Lady's (!!) College in the country was there and as she was a newcomer whose qualifications weren't known she got left out though I could tell at a glance she was a preddertory. She's what they call sultry. When there was no choice left for her she came over to me, grabbed my arm and said: 'My horrorscope said I was going to meet something special tonight' lamping me with eyes like a cat's under green lids, and licking lips that looked as though she'd been lapping blood. I could smell brimstone from the first, and if I hadn't been a cowerd I'd have run out then. I'd got caught in these klinches before but never with anyone so determined or maybe so experienced. When it comes to slushing round most of the girls let the boys take the lead and since I don't know how to lead, or don't want to learn, I've never gone very far.

This time we danced around for half an hour to the blaring of record after record never swopping partners. Fverybody else was doing the same if they weren't already on the lounge or behind it with a rug over them. The wise guys and wenches get in early for the best petting-places. But strong as she was, my Kleo couldn't get me down to it. Then the lights went out and I hadn't a chance or maybe I didn't want a chance. My head was getting muzzy with her all klamped on places where nobody'd ever klamped anything before in my life, and around us there were squeels and giggles.

She got her teeth in my ear and I yelped and she whispered: 'Let's go out in the shrubbery,' and poor weak-minded nong that I am I let her drag poor tottering me down the steps into the shelter of a pittosporum that very nearly made me drunk with its scent. She pulled me down

beside her and there we were madly mushing on the grass for I don't know how long with Kleo writhing like a demented boa constrictor and even I began to find my low-powered sex gear moving into top, till she fastened her open mouth on mine like a leach and stuck her tongue in. I don't know which it was that finished but I tore my mouth away with a noise like a cork coming out of a bottle and got up and staggered out of the gate and went round the corner and was sick. I mean sick. I threw up my dinner and a glass of punch I'd had and a glass of sherry. I went home, slipped in the back door, had a bath and got into bed and read the History of Mathematics.

After that, I didn't go to any more pash-parties. Sometimes when my father came home with something all cut and dried I sneaked off to the pictures instead. Sometimes I went down to T.T. and we had a night on the good old Mathematics.

\* \* \* \* \*

I could burst out laughing in Chapel when the Chaplain lectures us on the beauties of continence, and all the blokes turn their eyes down and the heat up.

Funny thing is that Squares like Legal and the Headmaster never seem to think about any real way of dealing with our growing pains. I blame them, really, because I think most of us would rather do something else if they'd only show us how.

I don't know why we do it. Most of us don't like it any more than I do but most of us haven't got the guts to refuse. There's a queer kind of pressure on us all to do it whether

we like it or not. If you don't, it puts you outside. So, if you mind that, what's to be done but sex-on?

Okey-doke Dear D., I'm outside. I've been outside since I was 16. And I like it.

Now, Dear Diary, don't think that I'm just another of those crazy mixed-up kids middle-aged writers like to use for their anti-heroes in these days of anti-plays and anti-novels and anti-life.

If you think I'm really so well-informed as that, D.D., don't be misled. I've picked it all up from the middle-brow discussions at my Step's and Ma's parties—not that she really contributes anything but Charm and Good Cheer. With the help of her char, VERY good! She has an empty mind. Any ideas she expresses are cut down from Step's old one's. Where he gets his new ones I don't know but I'll swear they're not his. So long as it suits him he uses everybody—Body and Brains. And she doesn't know it!

\* \* \* \* \*

Tempe did not hear the nurse the first time she spoke. She spoke again, louder. 'Don't you think it's time you settled down for the night, Mrs Caxton?'

'No,' Tempe said. 'No,' then, closing the book, and coming back to herself. 'I'm sorry. Yes, of course.'

She closed her eyes as the nurse pulled down the blinds and shut the doors to the balcony, chattering as she went about it.

She brought a glass of hot milk and a sleeping tablet.

The door swished after her.

Tempe lay still. Behind her closed lids there was only



blankness. She was drained of all feeling. Oh, this ugly, teenage world! This cruel monster of a teenage son who in his mind had stripped her of all dignity, judged her—and been right. How could he know at eighteen what she did not know at thirty-eight?

“An empty mind! ” Oh Chris, you would never have thought the words could hurt me so! ’

‘What is a woman to do, Chris? Once I left my father no one wanted me to use my mind.’

She remembered how Robert used to tease her about her ‘quicksilver wit’. He wanted to keep her that way.

Keith did it more subtly, always with the implication that a woman’s instinct was more important than her brain. He trusted her hunches but he was impatient of her thoughts.

‘You never knew how hard it is for women, Chris. Even your wonderful Aunt Lilian used to tell me when I was a girl that it doesn’t do for a woman to be too clever if she wants to be happy.’

Was she happy with Keith? She had thought so. But happiness was an illusion. Keith was right in that if nothing else. Life was an illusion and she had been tricked by the illusion till this last brutal shattering of it which even now her mind refused to accept.

She lay sleepless continuing her dialogue with the dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Diary, after our session in the primeval slime let me take a whole new page to tell you my solitary passion or perhaps they would say, my vice—Mathematics.

If it sounds sentimental it's probably becorse this is the first time I've written pro-something.

Well, here she goes! Fine prose, please!

My secret longings found shape and reason only last year when we had the luck for our Maths master to get some dezease that put him out of action for months. Up till then I only guessed that somewhere behind the unsatisfactory equations and the theorems and the combinations and the permutations was a fasinating world which our Temporary Teacher now gave us a glimse of. He's a wizard and told us about the disconnected aspects collectively called the Theory of Numbers that has exercised the greatest minds since the days of the Sumerians. Most of the Class wasn't interested. I swear there isn't another boy in it who has a mind except Withers the Swot and a migrant chap with a name like a line from an eye-test chart who's fabulous at history. If you're finding all this a bit hi-falutin, D.D., remember that I do Maths better than I write.

Good old T.T. I owe him everything. Those weeks he was with us were ilumination for me. In this dirty, greedy, money-hungry world I'd found the mystery and the merciless logic of Mathematics.

Quite by accident, I brought a rare moment of glory on the School by solving a mathematical problem T.T. brought to me that had stumped some University professors. Don't ask me how I did it. I sat down to study it. I had a sudden moment that, if I wasn't opposed to such metafysical nonsense I would call insperation, and there it was! It'll never happen to me again in a million years.

Apart from my personal astonishment it got me a par. in the newspaper—my Step saw to that, I suspect, so that for a moment I ranked in glory with the winners of Football Cups.

Step—in one of his many efforts to remove the insulation

that protects me from him—has been known to introduce me to incredulous cronies as a precocious kid who reads Maths for pleasure. Sykophants to the power he wealds in the Press, they laugh.

It makes me rithe so that I feel the blood run up my face and I shout inside: 'What's funny about reading Maths for fun? Would you prefer I concentrated on pornografy?' I've never said it because if I did he would know that he'd got through my insulating tape and that's a pleasure I striv. never to give him.

My Ma (I suspect) got me an invitation to a T.V. Show. I balked at that. None of them was going to dirty my new discovery.

The school was staggered. The class already considered that I should be certified and had they wanted anv confirmation of my loonacy this was it.

Legal, softened by having something to be proud of for once, coughed up some moola and I bought me *The World of Mathematics* (in four volumes) which has become my favourite bedside book. There I read extracts from writings of the great mathematicians down the ages and saw myself as an insignificant infintesably unimportant neofyte of the long distinguished chain of those who explored the Mystery of Numbers.

Legal announced that he was going to make an actuary of me. (He never asked what I wanted to make of myself.) This made me so mad that I used to spend weekends arguing with him things he reckoned were crazy—like why should three times two equal six? ( $3 \times 2 = 6$ ). Is there any place in the Universe where it doesn't?

I found this tricky one in a book J. F. lent me. He became my friend. The hours between school and home-going, and some of the evenings I was supposed to be at parties, I spent with him.

It is not drink or drugs as the class suspected that makes him shabby and haggard. There is no end to the money he could have made with his genius if he'd commercialized it, but he uses it only to provide him with a bare living so that he can give himself up to experimenting with the Theory of Numbers. Legal says all this theorizing is utterly useless from the practical point of view. He blew his top when I talked about the search for Perfect Numbers.

How explain to limited, business-bound calculating minds that I prefer to spend afternoons and evenings in T.T.'s shabby bed-sitter reeking of tobacco, bitter black coffee and crammed with books so that I have to clear one end of the table and lift books from the second chair to sit down. How explain that what I do is more adventurous than gate-crashing petting parties, with the wildest wackies whom only their father's money and their M.G.s and Bentleys save from being counted as Bodgies? How explain that it is the complement of under-water exploring, releasing my mind into exciting worlds as the depths release my body? They are both non-profit-making activities and the non-profit-maker is despised as a creep.

What would they think if they knew I was spending my Quarantene reading about Amicable Numbers? Tricky things. The sum of the Factors in one number equals the product of the factors in another. And what do you think? Last century an Italian Schoolboy Nicole Paganini (not the *other* Paganini the musician) discovered an Amicable Number that had eluded all professional Mathematicians!

Let's into it, Dear Diary. Into the wonderful world of Numbers! Who knows what ex-schoolboy Christopher Robert Armitage may find? Ha! Ha!

Dear D.D. Here I am 18 years and 3 weeks old and what does the Postman bring me just as I'm preparing to leave my quarantene and face the world again?

My call up for Military Service!!!! Manhood (Threshold of) confers upon me the right to fight and if necessary die for my kuntry à la Six Hundred but *not* to vote for the blustering bozo who will decide where and whom I shall fight. Lest I should have any inflated ideas of the urgent need that my country has of my services, Step sent a note on copy paper indicating that he has plummed the deepest desire of my cowardly heart. He states that if I want any help about dodging my call-up (he put it more Pharisaically than that) he would be pleased to use his Influence. What's he after, D.D.? for I sense in that son of Pegasus (spayed) a life-long dedication to no one but Number One.

I'd bet anything you like that he wangled getting me called-up so that he could then impress Ma by wangling my reprieve. God damn him! Why couldn't he keep his slick pen out of this?

Let me honest, Diary, I had every intention of dodging my call-up, a matter which I had discussed in lofty terms with my Headmaster, and at rather lower levels, with my Legal. Legal is nothing if not practical and he'll go on doing his duty by me, by God, even if it kills me. I notice that people with the highest patriotic principals are all set to leave the Protection of the Kuntry to the sons of the despised working class who haven't any influence to get them out of their call-up.

Until Step's letter came I'll swear I had no intention whatever of serving my country now or at any time. What eighteen-year-old of the most meeger intelligence would wish to serve a Kuntry that hadn't sense enough to do anything with the last half century except dispatch my Grandfather to Gallipoli, my father to the Middle East and prog-

nosticate a precipitate idiotic involvement of me and my unmilitary talent in the East that was once Far and now grows uncomfortably Near.

That scribbled message on copy paper made up what passes for my mind. I AM GOING TO DO MY MILITARY SERVICE, and God damn them all.

This would acheave a number of ends devoutly to be desired in some obscure corner of the mekanism that runs my cognitive processes largely devoted so far to getting my own way. (1) It will frustrate Legal who will be torn between sorrow at not seeing me on the road to being an Actuarial Big Wig and joy at his heart beating like a drum when he sees me in uniform. (2) It will annoy my Ma—she likes getting her own way—I would like to say hurt her, but though tears will maybe fill her bee-oo-tiful eyes, she will be too careful of her maskara to let them overflow: (3) Steppo will be furioso.

Turning over that particular section of my cerebellum labelled 'Malice' I begin to concoct a sweet little note to Ma, and another to Step that I hope long working over will give an air of casual irony. I'll dash it off on the back of a bank form to irritate them both—telling them that I think it is my Duty; that I couldn't possibly Betray My Country and ending with some phrase that will convey the meaning—Thank you for your offer to help me to do the Government in—though in more gentlemanly terms—all of it designed to convince them that I'm really a Wart.

They're right, of course, insofar as their view of me goes. Which certainly isn't far.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tempe closed the book, sighing. 'You're right there, Chris. It wasn't far.'

She switched off the reading-lamp and lay back against the pillows looking out on a midnight sky brilliant with stars.

For all she had known of Christopher or he of her they might have lived on worlds as far apart as those glittering in the ebony reaches of space.

When the anguish of his death had lessened she had consoled herself with the thought that in all the years he had lived she had done her best for him. She had given him everything he asked for. Now she realized that she had given him nothing that he wanted. It was a shattering discovery. From now on she had not only to live without him but without her illusions about their relationship. She had blamed his sudden mad infatuation for their estrangement in the last year of his life. She saw now that under all their superficial affection they had always been estranged because he blamed her, not for what she did, but for what she was.

She tried to sleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

March 6: A month later. IN CAMP.

Dear Diary, the pen that refused Step's offer to use his influence for me pricked him deeper than I would have thought any mere thrust of mine could, even if it was made with a fishing-spear. His reaction gave me such a boot in the behind that within a month behold me doing my National Service at Wallaba on the North Coast. I'm going

to have plenty of time to write to you while other blokes are writing letters home, so let me tell you about my new abroad.

The camp has been set on a flat that would be idillic if the Military hadn't ruined it. It was once an arm of the sea (I got this from a fellow Nasho Trainee whose hobby is Geology). Time has turned it into a grassy plane in the shelter of a mountain lying between us and the sea which we can hear in the quietness of our too-early nights.

We only see it when we crawl up the rocky sides of the Hogsback on manoeuvres and look down on it all blue like the water in which Aunt Lilian blued the sheets. Sometimes we see Whales spouting as they go up the coast.

The two beaches, Wallaba North and South, are separated by the sandy creek that runs through the camp and widens into a lagoon. From the Hogsback they look like the prongs of an old-fashioned anchor with the shank running out from the shore into a queer half-island called Whaler's because it was once a whaling station.

There's a sprawling white house on the highest part of the cliff with a tall flagpole with yardarms. It's the kind of place I'd like to live—somewhere people can come only at low tide.

Sometimes we see a fishing-boat coming into the little northern bay and three dark men pulling it up on to the sand. Other times there's someone working in a plantation that runs up from the beach and there is always a bunch of kids splashing around in the water. It's all out of bounds to us. There are various versions why. The cook who's been in this dump since the Rum Rebellion says it's because Whaler's is inhabited by a 'bunch of blackfellers', and a mad white man who once murdered a couple of innercent soldier-boys for making eyes at his gins. According to said cook the lubras lurk around trying to seduce said soldiers



while the mad white man lurks in the bush waiting to chop off their most precious possession.

None of us really believe it, of course. Even our brief experience has taught us that whatever happens to inner-city soldier-boys is generally their own fault.

Nobody's ever seen any of the lubras (Sorry! Women!) though Curtin Maples swears he passed a humdinger one afternoon when he was taking the Kolonel's mongrel for a run on South Wallaba. Unfortunately instead of trying to lure him on she ran off like Shirley Strickland, though Curtin swears it was the sight of the mong not him that gave her Olympic speed. The cook says all niggers are cowards.

Every time he says 'Niggers' there's a blue. 'Learn to give people their own names, can't you,' Curtin or Jim shout.

'What names?' the cook says, waving a ladel.

Call them Aborigines or if that word's too big for you, call them Blacks with a capital B. Don't you know the United Nations doesn't allow anyone to use the word nigger today.'

'Bulsh,' the cook shouts. 'I lived a long time among niggers in Africa and India and I know if you don't kick them in the teeth first they'll kick you to death.' Then he waves his ladel and glares at us and says: 'I'll be bloody glad when the Government sends all you bloody Nasho trainees to Malaya. That'll teach you to kick or be kicked.' (By the way, D.D., I can't bring myself to write what they actually say here.)

Mention of Malaya always starts another blue because a lot of the blokes are against war: Curtin calls 'dying to prop up dead kolonielisms and defunkt sultans'.

We exist in a Lost World here. Our Kolonel (Legal admires him!) got what experience he had in the Light

Horse in World War I. The serjent-major goes back to the Boar War, the Leftenant who is in charge of the section which calls itself Vocational Training is definitely a back number who does most of his work on the bunk from the rear. (This joke comes from Curtin—a good bloke.)

He describes the camp as organized Kaos—everything rigidly set to rule and always in a muddle.

When I rejected Step's Inflewence I thought a military camp would be the ultimate in objektivty where nameless cifers exchanged individuality for a number and in that anonimety found freedom from the abractive rubbing together of human souls and diskordent temperaments. I was wrong. The numbers with which they tab us here enclose us tighter than any prison cell.

Life here is konvincing me more and more that people who grew up before 1945 are a different race from those that grew up after. They talk about 'sekurity' as though actually such a thing existed, while those of us who began to think after the beginning of the New World—and what a world! —in '45 know that there's nothing sekure on earth not even the earth itself.

The Kolonel (like my Legal) has a lot of shorthand frases which don't mean a thing to us, like D. Day, V.J. Day, Anzac Day, when we're supposed to get hetted up over something to which we haven't a clew.

Thinking it over, D.D., it's bloody silly for these Army anakronisms to be teaching primitive methods of out-of-date warfare to a generation that knows with its second teeth that our only monument is likely to be the shadow left on the konkrete by a nuklear bomb.

Though not one in a thousand would admit it, the thought of being mass-murdered sets our nerves on edge all the time. If we're not volatilized by the H-Bomb, we'll most likely die defending my father's klients' investments

in Malaya or Thailand. And—as Blue, a World War 2 korporal says—F— —’em all!

If you notice a decline in my language, Dear Diary, put it down to the levelling influences of Sirvice for Your Kuntry. I’ve also taken a liking to the canteen beer perhaps because I want to be one of the boys, perhaps because—never mind the perhapses—I’ve taken a liking to the beer and can put down my middy with the best. Drinking, I find, is a habit one doesn’t have to learn.

I see little signs here of fulfilment of that aluring poster which says Join the Army and Make Your Career. Nobody here is likely to make a career in anything but spud-peeling or jungel-flogging in bush where vines trip us up and leeches attach themselves to any uncovered bit of skin.

When we’re not impersonating baboons we’re stabbing dummys with bayonets --something we all beleaved went out with the Krimcan War.

The other Nashos think I’m a weird bloke. But they leave me alone as long as I leave them alone, and leaving people alone is my one virtue. They’re kind to me in an off-hand way, because I’m worse than anybody at anything and everything. When we return flat out, from Kommando Training, those of us whose minds have a capacity to still tick over ask in unprintable language why it should be necessary to learn to swing from limb to limb on trees, hang from perilus cliffs, cross jagged gullys on lawyer-vine bridges—all this at a time when modern military mirakles have reduced the likelihood of the roll we shall play in any war to a hektic sprint in the four-minute warning we’ll have before a monster bomb is delivered by an interkontinental rocket to blast us and the earth to nothing.

In spite of the food, wich reaches an all-time low in indebility, being cooked by a joker who was perminently

soured in the Western Desert, I can see that I shall emerge from this hell-hole tough as wipcord, competent to compete with any orangatang in the jungle, with anything intellectual I ever learned skoured from me and in its place a cerebral vakuum that may yet equip me for promotion to one of the Higher Ranks, should my native kommon sense be so abraded by the war of attrition waged against it that I have none left at all when I've finished.

It has one advantage. It brings me in close contact with blokes I would in my normal life know only when we met in some business way. I prefer them to my class-mates, finding them in general as synical but less hippercritical about it and less likely to give virtuous reasons about the various methods by which they intend later to exploit the State. Except by accident it won't be from these Nashos that will spring the politicians and the salesmen and the journalists. These will provide the hewers of wood and the drawers of water, or there modern equivalents: the gasmen, the sewer-men, the electricians, the bus-drivers; people who keep our Kommunity on an even keel and get less for it in a year than my Legal makes in a week.

Jim tells me things I never thought about before. 'Look at me,' he says, 'I'd have eaten my hat to have your chance to go to school. And you liked school less than you like the Army. But what happens to me? I have to get out when I'm fifteen and a grateful country gives me permission to work earlier than the law allows because my Dad is a T.P.I., having volunteered in 1939, not through nobility or patriotism but because he had been unemployed for seven years during which he rotted on six bob a week dole till war came. He got caught in Greece. Joined the Greek partisans in the mountains. Fought with them, till he was shot by a Nazi. Nearly passed out in a Greek peasant's hut, and came home to a helluva life on a Totally & Permanently Invalided

pension not enough to bring up his kids properly or keep my mother from worrying her heart out.

'Still, better off than the Greek bloke he fought with in Greece. He was a hero when he fought the Nazis but jailed for sixteen years when they'd won. Like the Chinese and Malavans we were glad to have fight the Japs for us in Malaya, and shot as terrorists five years later.

'What has democracy done for me? I wanted to be a geologist and what am I? At fifteen and three months delivering the orders from a grocery store. There wasn't even a chance for me to learn a trade because there was no room for apprentices at that time and when I did get apprenticed and started doing Geology at the Tech. I got my call-up.'

His stories of his family and his work bore me, but I put up with them because I was always waiting for him to get on with the interesting geology stuff. Manooovers become bearable when he's with me. He can make interesting even the 'terrain' over which we're wearing out our feet.

One day when the serjent was more than usually tetchy (the word is the cook's), he shouted so that he could be heard across the whole of the drill field. 'What the devil d'you think the Army's for?' Jim's 'If you don't know, sir, how would you expect me to?' got a roar of applause from the unit that cost us our evening recreation. Everyone reckoned it was worth it.

\* \* \* \* \*

My leave has been a flop since I came to camp. First one I went to Legal's place and that was hell. Every single minute we spent together for the whole forty-eight hours we

walked all over the Western Desert and I fell into the train feeling that I was escaping from a chane-gang.

The next time I went to Ma's. That was worse. Best thing was I took Aunt Lilian to the pictures for the first part of the night; Lousey film but she liked it—cried all the time.

That night Ma had a big party for the crew that won the Sydney-Lord Howe Yacht Race. Step was one of them. When I got home about midnight they were all well stuck into the hops and fighting the wind and the storm and the currents and the waves from Sydney Heads to the finishing line. For five minutes Ma and Step were madly nice to me and then forgot I was there. It always makes me want to puke when Ma sloshes all over me with trilling birdlike notes at how I've grown up or out. I don't think she cares which way I've grown but it shows how clever she is to have a Nasho son and still look 25—or so she thinks—parading round in the latest fashion that looks like a pillowslip.

I went out to the kitchen, tucked away what was left of the Cape Cod Lobster and the Chicken Maryland and the blackberry pie with a couple of mint juleps and then (the noise was terrific) let down the camping body of the car, rolled myself in a rug and went to sleep. Mint juleps knock me.

Next morning I wandered around like the last survivor of an H-Bomb with bodies snoring everywhere in the flat: gorged myself on the remnants of the night before, washed Jasper—a nice little useless sort of dog she pays no more attention to than she pays to me, got my spear-fishing gear and went down and poked around the rocks for a bit, with the blokes from the Yacht Club shouting to me to look out for sharks—it's the breeding season.

When I got back at midday they were awake drinking as though they'd been six weeks on a perish and believe it or

not, winning that yacht race all over again!! I left on an early train.

The next month my ankle tied me up at camp. Thereby hangs a tail!!!

\* \* \* \* \*

'I don't want to hear your tale,' Tempe muttered angrily as she threw the diary aside.

She rested her head against the back of the armchair, futile anger seething in her, all the bitterer for its futility. What use to be angry with the dead? Or argue with them? But her ceaseless argument went on.

'Oh, Chris. can't you see it wasn't all my fault? You set out to misunderstand everything I ever did. I tried to do my best for you. Keith tried too, even your Father tried, though heaven knows you could be aggravating enough. I tried to make you feel at home with us. We all tried to do our best for you. Why did you make it so hard for us? I loved you. I loved Jasper, too. Leave me at least that.'

Anger ebbed leaving her dry, empty. Dead, he had built a barrier between them more insurmountable than when he was alive.

'Where did I fail?' she asked herself. 'Where did we fail?' It wasn't only that she had left his father. He hated his father as bitterly as he hated her. It wasn't only that they were divorced. She knew many divorced couples whose children were as normal and affectionate as in the closest of families.

She wondered what Robert would say if she sent him the diary? But much as she disliked him, she wouldn't do it—

not only for her sake but for his. He was an old man now. Let him at least live out his life with some illusions left.

She had none. Her son had stripped her to the skin. She had nothing to live by, nothing to live for.

Wearily she turned over the page.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear D. Wouldn't it? I must be the unluckiest coot alive—and only just that! Here I am, wounded in peaceful (?) manoeuvres!

Evidence that fate is on the side of the unworthy I sprained an ankle and my left wrist when a rope broke as I was hanging baboon-like in mid air across a 'donga', and bang! There I was under the waterfall, half-stunned, with terrific pain in my leg and arm.

The mob made a hell of a row. Jim and Curtin waved the rope at the Sarjent and all the other blokes howled blue murder and refused to go through the rest of the jazz.

When the Sarge found I wasn't dead he bawled me out for shamming so I limped back to camp with Jim and Curtin helping. I was reprimanded at supper because I took off my boot and put on a sand-shoe which went into the katergy of dereliction of duty. I couldn't sleep for the pain and overnight my hand swelled up to match my foot and ankle but it wasn't till my cobbers threatened to go on strike next day that the S.M. admitted that it wasn't a self-inflicted wound and I was sent off to the Doctor.

Somehow or other the Kolonel had discovered that I was something of a mathematical freak, and when my war wounds brought me to his eye he decided that I might



bring glammer if not glory to his Staff by being able to work out the problems that his non-mathematical mind can't cope with. These include the questions of trajectory, which his firing serjent does with a kind of automatic hindsight which he can't put into figures and so the Kolonel's reports to higher-ups are always lacking those impressive kalkulations unintelligible to most and so all the more highly regarded.

It was as simple as falling off a rope and less painful—physically, that is.

Now that the K.O.'s vices have left him—he had a reputation of doing-over service women in the last war in the line of Duty—but now, his secret weapon worn out, he dreams not of palpetating female flesh but pulped niggers and vapourized Reds. Everything he touches is filthied o'er with his bloody-minded fervour for murder, e.g. how many acres of human flesh will a nuklear personnel bomb vapourize if landed bang in the centre of a crowded Indonesian village or Malayan kampong?

Two days was as much as I could stand though the kalkulations of killings demanded no super-intelligence or high-class kalkulations. For two days I tossed them off with a facility that stunned the whole staff which, judging by its reactions, had never got beyond first-year Algebra. Newton only knows how long I would have gone on prostituting myself for the sake of a comfortable chair in a quite office and the crumbs from the staff's table—tastier than those that landed in the canteen—but my mind went on me. I don't know if you'll understand what I mean, D.D., but if you know what it means when a mussle goes on you when you're running, or you get a cramp when you're swimming, well, it was something like that only not quite like it. It was a blackout as though deep down in me an electric light switch was turned off. I was so fascinated by this sign of the

higher morality of the inner man compared with my lowth-some outer kapacity for kompromise that I got out, quickly, driven by a panic lest my prostitution might make my mind impotent. It was attributed to insabordination, contempt of Kolonel, cussedness, and dum insolence, and down I descended to the cookhouse, traling clouds of glory that filled with awe the simpler minds for whom two and two don't always make four.

So now behold me unfitted for bow-and-arrow corps, spear-drill or boomerang-throwing and relegated to the job of potatoe peeling.

The M.O. assures me that my hand and wrist will benifit by the exercise though the left has difficulty in holding the nobbly veg. while the right hand hacks at its nobbles and pecks at its eyes.

Let me say, I enjoy a kind of popularity in reverse among the gang for what they consider my heroic refusals to serve the Kolonel's military mashinations.

I am happier than I've been for a long time. You can only peel potatoes a limited time in twenty-four hours and so I return to my pursuit of Numbers.

My day is spent between cheery chiacking chores and blissful hours with my Problems in that uncorupted and uncorruptable world of Mathematics. My innerself has rewarded the outer me by performing all kinds of tricks with flashes of non-spiritual inspiration.

I don't open the letters that come addressed in my Ma's handwriting sprawling over thick cream envelopes or my Legal's neatly and ekonomically written on office notepaper. Only from Aunt Lilian to whom I toss off her notes to which she is accustomed and which she finds incomprehensible but likes getting.

I owe the medico's interest in my case not to my own sweet charm but to my mother's solicitude when she heard

about my accident from Aunt L. She arrived suddenly one weekend, my Step driving her in a Cadillac flamboyant as she was. That's the wrong word. It was glossy, streamlined, and elegant, and so was she. She crowed over me with the maternal solisitude I've always distrusted, and had the Staff eating out of her lily-white hands within ten minutes of her arrival. She and Step took dinner with the Staff. She cooed over my still-swollen hand and ankle. Step regreted that I hadn't had the good sense to use my gifts for the good of the Kolonel. He is a man with his eyes perpetually on the mane chance, and if he dislikes me because he thinks he had to share my Ma's affections with me (crumbs from the rich woman's table) he is irritated by the fact that I could be successful if I wanted to.

I saw again on the faces of everyone as they looked from my Ma to me and me to my Ma the amazement that anything so like a film star (even if a bit long in the tooth) could have produced me. I've seen her knock them over, lay them in the isles so often like this that it's lost its effect on me.

My popularity underwent a sudden decline with my cobbers who smelt that Inflewence was going to interveen on my behalf. I ceased to be trusted or trustworthy, and I didn't blame them at all. I never wanted to be popular but I felt it when my cobbers withdrew their matiness.

It took the pleasure out of the M.O.'s order that I should spend three hours in the afternoon on the beach as much of it as I could bear in the water exercising my foot. Important, you know, that we should have foot-sloggers to go in masked and in protective clothing to clear up the radio-active remnants (if any) of the new war.

Blue, the Korp, who drove me said the first morning: 'The Kolonel's got the wind up proper. There's been a real stink about the rope that broke and dropped you into the

donga. The S.M.'s been saying for months they needed new rope, but the C.O.'s always trying to keep in good with the Brasshats down South so he never asks for any equipment until it kills someone. Then your mother being married to that journalist fellow's got him in a proper sweat.'

He gave his laugh that's rather like a kookaburra starting off before Revally.

'Crikey you're lucky. You've got a beaut racket if you stick to it.'

Stick to it I certainly will.

The jeep drops me at the beginning of the lagoon and I go over the sandhill. Going up it is agony for my foot, but I bite my lips and stick it out waiting for the moment when I'll come over the top and the sea will be there.

I don't know what gave the sand the colour of squashed apricots. Jim did explain it but I've forgotten. I only know it's great to walk through it without my shoes and feel it squitch between my toes. It's clearly defined where I can go and where I can't. A strip of beach a hundred yards by a hundred to the south of Whaler's is my sanatorium, as you might call it. I take my busted ankle and my damaged wrist into the surf accompanied by the rest of me—the more exercise the better, but I must never, never, never put my foot on Whaler's.

\* \* \* \* \*

Saturday Night. A funny thing happened today, D.D. Because the Kolonel had an Inspektion in the morning the M.O. changed my beach time. The afternoon light made the sea look like millions of yards of silk stretched flat and

shiny with the waves at the edge making a fringe. It was a very high tide (Equinox). I limped over the beach, my ankle hurting like hell from the long standing at the morning's inspection, took off my shorts and dived through the first wave and felt it wash the dirt out of me. Then I put my head down and began to swim the regulation hundred yards feeling my arm pull more strongly than it had done before though my ankle still refused its share of the six-beat. Then the race caught me and before I knew where I was swept me over the causeway into Whaler's little bay. I stood up feeling silly and found four faces looking at me, chins level with the water, all accusing me of trespassing. A girl the colour of milk chocolate and with terrifically big eyes, snapped: 'What are you doing here?'

'Sorry,' I said. 'The current swept me over.'

'Don't you know Whaler's is out of bounds?'

'I know it is to the ordinary troops, but ...'

'And what are you?'

'I mean the Medical Officer sends me down to the surf to swim every day because I was injured badly at manoeuvres.'

I hate shooting a line, but suddenly wanted to make it seem worse than it was.

'Then keep to the surf, and don't come on to our beach.' She turned and swam towards the tiny sandy beach and the others raced after her in a descending string running from chocolate to milk-coffee colour. Furious, I shouted after her, 'I wasn't on your beach.' She turned, and even at a distance I saw her eyes blazing. 'Then keep out of our bay,' she shouted back.

I stood looking at them, speechless with fury as they filed up the path and disappeared among the banana palms, then I went back to my regulation hundred yards thinking up all the things I should have said.

I had a bad night, because every time I dozed off after

that I saw those two big eyes suspended in front of me like two black headlights.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monday. 25th March. This is a new start, D.D. I don't know why I'm giving the date except that now each day is a definite day and not just a kind of film unwinding without any particular interest. Probably if it hadn't been for the Kolonel's mong I'd have gone on with eyes like headlights flicking on and off in my dreams. Everybody hates the K.'s dog, that is, everybody under Serjent. He's an Afgan. You can't really tell what he's like as a dog for the scraggy hair that covers him from top to toe and tail to nose. Looks like one of those big hairy triantelopes that crawl onto our mosquito nets. He was brought up on the parade ground and the K.'s frightfully proud because he takes orders better than we do—something that sends the boys rocking inside with laughter they don't dare to let out in front of him. He barks like the K. Jim swears that if he'd had an extra paw he'd carry a riding crop.

His pedigree card has him registred as Kyber of Khanda-har a name everybody thinks so repulcively snobish that out of K.'s hearing he is never anything but Kib. Well, Kib developed an itch, and Scratch he would. The M.O.-vet suddenly had the bright idea that what he needed was sea water. I can see the K.'s little red-lidded piggy eyes glaring at me as he informed me that as part of my cure I should take the mong with me to the beach, see he got proper exercise and plenty of swimming. My companion-in-arms nearly burst their buttons when they heard that I was going to be wet-nurse for Kib.

That mong has a split personality, too. He climbs the sandhill beside me with the stolid air of an old soldier who thinks there's something particularly clever in being able to keep in step. I'll swear he tries to keep in step with me though I make that as hard as possible by stumbling and changing step at every tussock of grass. At the top he turns round and watches the jeep back out along the track beside the lagoon, woofs a salute to the driver and, when he disappears, goes mad! He tears down the sandhill and by the time I've got to the beach is racing around madly in circles, with ears flopping, tongue lolling and the urkanny air of chasing a dog that I have difficulty in believing isn't there.

All the time I have the feeling that for him I'm not there, either, much the same as I have the feeling when I go to the K.'s office and he goes on pretending to read some document. Not that there's anything vicious about Kib. Like any upper rank he keeps his distance as though he says in doggy language: 'You let me alone, and I'll let you alone.'

'Okay,' I said, 'if that's how you want it,' though out of sight of the camp I might even have been prepared to have broken through the class-distinction that separates us. I like dogs but the only one I ever knew well is Jasper—Legal is an anti-dogger.

When I throw off my clothes and go splashing into the water Kib splashes in too, but at least twenty feet away. When I swim out, he swims out. When I float, he floats.

When I run along the sand he runs, making it quite clear that he isn't interested in my pacing but only in catching a seagull or two. When I stretch out on the sand he keeps up the game he never gets tired of, and when I start across the sand, he plods along at the regulation distance, and I swear that his ears droop more, his jaws sag and his plummy tail droops too.

At the top of the sandhill he sits a moment looking back at the beach and the seagulls. Believe it or not as soon as the jeep comes tooting along the sandy track he becomes the K.'s dog again, and begins to pace in his dignified military air down the sandhill, up to the jeep and clambers to the seat beside the driver (I can sit in the back) and closing his eyes, prepares his soul to return to camp.

After a few days I began positively to like him for his hypocrisy. I'd like to ask him if he knows what's on the medal dangling from his spikey-studded collar: 'This dog is the property of Colonel Knox, C.O. at Wallaba Military Camp' because believe it or not that dog is nobody's property. He conforms and thereby has the best of both worlds and I'll swear he knows it.

\* \* \* \* \*

April 1. A most appropriate date. Today coming over the sandhill with eyes that have developed a telescopic capacity I saw five black heads (one kanine) bobbing in the bay. Remembering the unfriendly reception I had last weekend, I planted myself on the extreme frontier of my hundred yards strip farthest from them, turned my back, and pretended to be looking for shells or worms. It was a very low tide.

While I meandered on the southern boundary Kib continued pursuing seagulls to the north. Any other animal not protected by military rank from the facts of life would have sniffed the Other dog. Granted I didn't see it, but then I'm only human. I'll swear he didn't know what hit him when a black streak shot over the causeway and bowled



him over with the force of his rush before poor old Kib had time to come out of his bird-catching dreams. If it hadn't been for that spiked collar he'd have been a gonner. Camp life and lack of competition had made him soft.

As I covered the sands as fast as my ankle would let me, all I could see was a ginger and black mass rolling and rithing as indistinguishably as one of those early drawings of the Cubists to illustrate movement. Four figures streamed in descending order over the causeway. I beat them by twenty yards, and whether out of affection for Kib or fear of the K.'s rawth or more likely just plain exhibitionism, I went into the scrap. The black mong had his teeth sunk in the back of Kib's neck, but he couldn't get a death grip because of the spiked collar. I grabbed the aggresor by the lether collar he wore, and pulled. His teeth must have slipped on the brass studs and he came back snarling and snapping, turned and closed his jaws on my bad ankle. It was all a whirl, and I had only time to see the four figures coming up the straight as I fell flat on my puss with the mong gnawing me. I don't know if you've ever been bitten by a dog, but it kind of strips all your civilized veneer off to feel teeth grate on the bone. The tall girl pulled him off and I came up in time to grab Kib who was getting ready to streak the wrong way. It must have looked damned silly, me sprawled across the sand holding on to Kib, the girl pulling at the snapping mong and both dogs yapping their heads off and the kids yelling at the tops of their voices like a football crowd.

There I was, hand all bloody, wiping the sand the combattants had kicked into my eye and with my already puffed up foot decorated with a neat line of tooth holes like a bracelet round the ankle.

The girl gave a couple of solid kicks to their mong and told the biggest of the kids to take him home and the

second biggest to help him. So, there they were, the kids dragging, the mong resisting every inch of the way, Kib panting like an outboard motor and only recovering slightly when the mong was practically out of bark-shot.

The girl dropped on her knee and took my foot in her hand grabbed up my towel and gave it to the littlest to go down and soak the end in water. She went with the speed of light and came back with it wet and sandy. The girl without saying a word wiped my ankle. I felt silly leaning back on my hands while she mopped. It wasn't bleeding much but it was paining like hell and there were a couple of good gashes on both inner and outer ankle bones. She sent the kids again to bring some non-sandy sea water in a beer bottle washed up by the tide. The foot stung as she poured it over. Then she caught sight of the blood on my hand and moved so quickly to examine it that I went off balance. She poured the water over it, wiped it with my towel and was as pleased as I was to find that blood was Kib's not mine. Then she knelt back on her haunches and looked at me steadily with those enormous black flash-lights and said in the voice that I liked even when it was putting me in the wrong.

'I'm sorry, but Viking is trained to keep people off Whaler's.'

'I wasn't on Whaler's,' I said, defensively, though belijirence might have been justified in the cirkumstances.

'I know you weren't. But your dog...'

'He isn't my dog, he's the Kolonel's at the Camp.'

'Oh!' Her square white teeth dug into her lip. I've never tried to describe a face before but it's long with high cheek-bones—a bit too thin for her wide mouth that curls up at the corners. I can imagine any sculptor wanting to sculpt. Her nose is snub, nice snub, but really I don't remember anything but her eyes, and her broad forehead

under the wet curling black hair. I've never been close up to anyone as dark as she is—milk chocolate with a gloss on it. I can see her gaping at me with her eyes wider than ever and her mouth open.

'The Kolonel's dog! Oh, that's bad.'

'Why is it worse than me being bitten by your mong?' I said, bellijarently this time, cos I was a bit sour at her thinking that the Kolonel's dog more important than me.

Then she said: 'Well, you see, about a year ago Viking bit the serjent-major.'

I laughed.

'It isn't funny. The Kolonel threatened to shoot Viking and went to the local police and it was only settled when it was proved by other soldiers that the serjent-major was actually trespassing.'

'I wasn't trespassing,' I said again defencively.

'I know. And that's the trouble, because now the Kolonel will have an excuse and the police in the township will do as he asks. I don't know what we'll do if Viking is shot. We all love him.'

She looked at me pleadingly, and I had one of those moments of wonder at the things people love. Kib was unloveable enough but their mong hadn't even enough of that famed dog-sense to know he was biting a friend because without any question I'd be on the side of a dog that bit the serjent-mjor.

'Anyway, he's a savage brute,' I said.

'He's nothing of the sort. He's never bitten anyone except the serjent-major.'

'And me.'

'Yes.' She knelt there looking at me and one of those long silences began to draw out. Silence is one of her talents unless she's in a rage. Now she sat silent nodding slowly and the tears came into her eyes so they looked larger than ever.

She looked down to hide them and tried to blink them away, running the sand through fingers that were long and thin and delicate and very gentle yet strong. That's her all over.

I began to relent as I saw a tear run over her curly black lashes and then the horn of the jeep began to toot loudly and I realized I should have been waiting on the sandhill. I got up. Kib got up quickly at a sound that promised him rescue from wild beasts. She stood up too and I was surprised to find she was nearly as tall as I was with the wittled-down fineness of a surf board.

'Please tell the Kolonel we'll send Viking away, but don't let them shoot him, please.'

I had a sudden idea rather like the sparkling notions that unwind the knots in my mathematical thinking, but I wasn't going to let her in on it then. 'Don't worry,' I said. 'I'll nut something out.'

She stared at me incredulously and then she began to smile. The first time I saw her I didn't think she was pretty but now— Anyway as the horn went on tooting I gathered up my things and began to walk across the sand, limping much more than was necessary.

'Oh, thank you. Thank you,' she called after me. 'Thank you very much.'

Kib was already well ahead of me, his Mickey-mouse feet plodding across the sand faster than usual. Just before I reached the top I turned and looked back and gave her a salute, a silly thing to do from one who hates saluting, and went over the top of the sandhill and down the other side.

'You're bloody late,' Blue said, sourly, and then, catching a glimpse of my nicely bloodstained foot—the walking had made it bleed again—he exclaimed, 'Cripes, did you meet a shark?'

'Kyber did it,' I said.

'What?' He practically shouted the word as he got in behind the wheel, and waited for me to put on my slacks and shirt.

'Kyber,' I said, lawncing myself into the lie happily. 'You'd better look out for the savage brute,' I warned as he jumped in beside the driver's seat. Blue slid farther away. 'Back seat, Kyber,' I roared in a Kolonelish voice and he crawled over and collapsed as though he'd been torn to bits instead of only having a gash in the loose skin.

'Do you mean that pedigree mong actually bit you?' Blue asked.

'He bit me.' Then seeing Kyber's eye on me in reproach, 'I don't think he meant to do it, but he attacked a dog on the beach and when I tried to drag him off he went berserk and grabbed my ankle.'

'Crikey!' Blue lit a cigarette and passed one over to me. 'I didn't believe the pooch had it in him. What'll the Kolonel say?'

'I don't know, but *I* say he's dangerous.'

Blue burst out laughing.

When I limped in and reported Kib's misdemeanour I could see the Kolonel didn't believe me, till I showed him my Active Service wounds. It was a toss up which of us was going to get the M.O.'s services first, but finally I got attention for the ankle and a tetanus injection *before* he was asked to stitch up the rent in Kib's neck. That over I was hauled in to the K.'s office and got the inquisition.

'You mean Kyber actually attacked the other dog?' he roared in his worst parade-ground voice.

'He did, sir.'

'What was the other dog doing?'

'He was running along the beach on Whaler's, and before I knew what he was up to, Kib went tearing across the causeway and into him. I went as fast as my ankle let me

after him but they'd nearly finished it before I got there. When I dragged him off he turned on me.'

Telling a lie to me has always been hard because generally you tell a lie to save someone else's feelings and I never saw why I should save anyone's feelings. Let 'em like it or lump it. But now I really enjoyed myself.

The K. gave a deep sigh or rather a gasp.

'I can hardly beleave it,' he said.

'He certainly doesn't seem to be much of a fighter.'

'He's not meant to be a fighting dog: he's a hunting dog,' the Kolonel shouted going pinker and pinker.

'Well, he certainly started a fight to-day and from my own experience I think he ought to be shot.'

There was no doubt about the gasp then. He went the colour of cooked lobster and the spit came out the corner of his mouth.

He snapped. 'Are you prepared to make a report on this?'

'Yes, sir. I'd like to do it now while all the details are fresh in my mind.'

What I meant was before I forgot the story I'd cooked up. So his pimply-faced secretary came in all ironed and starched like an advertisement for the Armed Forces and took down the story, practically falling off his chair when I asked him to make a carbon copy for me. He stammered that it wasn't the usual thing and I said it's not the usual thing for a trainee to be bitten by the Kolonel's dog, either, and I want to have a copy in case of any developments.

That stonkered them.

Nobody, not even the Kolonel, really believed I'd been bitten by Kib but what could they do about it?

Everybody laughed their heads off and wondered what the devil I was doing putting over what everybody guessed was a lie. The poor mutt seemed to develop an affection for

me as his rescuer which gave rise to a rather corny joke saying that evidently he liked the taste of me and was hoping to have another chance at the shin of beef.

The M.O. was ordered to extend my period of recuperation on the beach. In the first place it was to be accompanied by Kib but Kib chickened-out of it. When he saw me come out and prepare to get into the jeep he beat it nearly as fast as his Afgan ancestors over the deserts of Middle Asia for the Kolonel's sleeping quarters and got under the bed. I felt like the criminal threatened with exposure by the victim he's been trying to frame but the Kolonel had got so fond of the public image of him as a fierce, man-eating beast that he didn't want to have the myth exploded.

Anyway, he's torn by the terror that if I get tetanus it will be due to his dog and I don't know what there is in A.R. about that. So I have to continue my medical treatment on the beach and I'm free of Kib's company, which I'd regret if it wasn't for new developments.

It isn't only strategy that keeps my limp. The M.O. said Kib's teeth had apparently ripped the tendon I tore in the donga, just where it had began to knit.

'Being bitten by the Kolonel's dog's better than a medal,' Blue said.

More useful, anyway.

\* \* \* \* \*

Blue's right about a lot of things, D.D., but the main thing about this ankle is that it gets me to the beach. When I came over the sandhill the first time after the bite my

heart joggled to see the dark patches in the Bay. I was very careful to keep in bounds, undressed on the furthest perimeter, went into the water and apart from a dignified salute kept myself to myself. I swam up and down the beach which brought me to within about five yards of the causeway which I pretended not to see and on my second lap the biggest dark boy was hopping up and down there and saying, 'Zanny says why don't you come and swim in the Saucer. It's better there.'

She was right. The Saucer (they called it that because it wasn't big enough for a basin) had a rock-bottom and the surf broke over the side of it so you got water clear as ginger-ale and with the same sizziness about it due probably to beating on the rocks. I felt a bit silly when I waded in after the kid and stood looking at Zanny who was up to her shoulders while the three smaller ones kicked and splashed and dog-paddled around us.

'Hello,' I said, in what must rank as one of literature's lamest approaches.

'Hello. We're releaved to see you back. We were worried when you didn't come the last couple of days.' She always says 'we' in a voice like a harp playing on the deeper notes. 'We were afraid that something might have happened to you...'

'Because old Kyber bit me?' I asked.

'Kyber!' Her eyebrows went up.

'Yes,' I said.

'But our dog's name is Viking.'

'Viking?' I said. 'That's the poor dog that Kyber attacked. I'm the poor bloke Kyber bit when I tried to pull him off Viking.'

They all looked at me with much the same expression in four pairs of eyes that are too dark to be brown and too full of light to be black. Then Zanny smiled without any sound



at all at first only her throat quivering and her eyes sparkling, and then suddenly everybody burst out laughing and it was like an aviary of birds. It wasn't really. It was like a lot of happy people laughing together. When Zanny stopped she looked at me with the laughter still overflowing her eyes and said, 'You don't mean to tell me that's what you told the Kolonel?'

'Madam,' I said, in a very stiff way, shooting a line like hell. 'Madam, those are the true facts of the case which I reported to the Kolonel and signed.'

Oh that poor, silly, harmless dog.'

'Dangerous,' I corrected.

'They won't shoot him will they?'

'Don't worry about him. The Kolonel's been boasting about it everywhere, and it's gone to Kyber's head so long as he doesn't have to come to the beach with me.'

We all laughed together then. A little bit hysterically. I think. I remember it with the water spraying up as the kids lay on their backs and kicked madly and the waves broke over the rocks and came in on us in a shower of foamy spray and I felt it was the best fun I'd ever had in my life. When we'd stopped giggling our heads off, Zanny—by then I'd found out her name was Zanny after her grandmother Suzannah Swanberg.

When she said 'Zanny Swanberg', Larry, who was about twelve, grinned and said, 'We're black swans.' And we all laughed madly again and Viking, who was tied up on the beach, barked his head off in company; in fact, he never stopped barking. Zanny looked at me and said, 'Would you like to come to the beach and meet him?'

'No thanks,' I said. 'I've already met him.'

That set them all laughing again. I've never known any people who laughed so much and she said: 'Yes, but this is different. He wants to apologize.'

‘Well,’ I said, ‘I’ll accept his apology so long as he’s on that chain.’

So we all filed ashore, the kids swimming ahead of us like brown eels, and when I stepped on the shore of Whaler’s I had the kind of feeling I had when I read adventure-books when I was a kid.

We all went up to Viking who by then had nearly choked himself in his excitement and Zanny bent down and put her hand on his collar and said: ‘Now Viking, tell the young man you’re sorry.’

And believe it or not that mong crawled towards me, put his head on his paws, and looked up at me with such a look in his eyes that you could practically hear him talk.

‘Pat him, now, to show you really forgive him,’ Zanny said. I couldn’t let on that I was frightened but I felt my ankle tinkle as I bent down and there he was licking my hand all over with a wet flannel washer and explaining that it had all been a mistake so let’s forget it.

So I forgot it.

‘Run up and get some bananas,’ Zanny ordered, and all the kids streaked across the sand and came back with a couple of hands of bananas, and we all sat on the beach and ate them. Everybody examined my ankle with the greatest interest. I’m not sure whether there wasn’t more pride in what Viking’s teeth had managed to do in such a short time than sympathy for me.

Said Peter, the five-year-old, who was real chocolate colour: ‘I reckon Viking could eat you if he really got stuck into it.’

When I said we’d let him practice on somebody else, everybody rolled over laughing and Viking after slobbering around us sat up with a perpetual kind of grin on his face. He’s really a nice-looking kelpie-cross.

That day I beat it over the sand hill, just as the

jeep came round the lagoon. I wasn't going to risk anything.

'Meet any sharks today?' Blue asked me, with his spiky eyebrows lifted up and a grin that said quite clearly he didn't know what I was up to but he was with me anyway.

'Not today,' I said, 'but I did see a mermaid.' Then I thought what a silly fool I was to go wisecracking like that and felt the blood spreading over my face but Blue took that as my kind of joke too and started off with a 'You young uns have all the luck.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Diary, I saw Zanny again today. It was her morning off. She's a wardsmaid at the local hospital

'I'd like to be a nurse,' she said.

'Why not?' I said. 'You've got lovely soft hands for a nurse, even if you are inclined to rub sand into the wound.'

We both laughed. Then I said: 'Aren't you old enough?'

'I'm nearly eighteen,' she said shrugging her shoulders.

There were hollows under her shoulderbones. I've decided that I'd rather have thin girls than ones with bulges all over them. When she looked up I thought nobody's got eyes like hers, not even Marilyn Monroe, nor hands that give you the feeling that they have electric currents in them. Figure isn't like T.V. and film stars, just two little breasts like apples on a suppel torso and hips that make hardly more of a bulge than a boy's. For the first time I understood what the words in the magazines Ma reads, mean—lithe, willowy, etc.

The two small ones, Peter and Toffee, who don't go to school, hopped around us on the sand like frogs with Viking yelping frantically, every now and then stopping to come over and give me a nudge with his cold nose and a slosh with his tongue. He certainly apologized often that dog, but I had no hard feelings towards him at all. Quite the contrary.

\* \* \* \* \*

Influence may be useful but it can't make you popular, so I've decided to go back to estimating the Kolonel's trajectories for him. I want to stay here. And there's no fun peeling potatoes now that the coves have sort of froze me out.

Now my mathematical conscience has realized that what we're doing is of no use to the bloodiest-mindedest survivor of the Zulu War, we're enjoying ourselves. In the few hours not devoted to 'medical' treatment my peculiar kink allows me to get more done than the Kolonel, the Captain, the Loot, a computator and a slide-rule get done in three months, and always with such odd results that if anyone followed their plans he'd surely blow himself up. A good thing with certain people. Trouble is the rest of us will go with the bloody-minded mugs.

Only a mind like the K.'s could possibly be interested in planning trajectories for five miles and fifteen miles when the I.C.B.M. does five thousand whichever way it's going or coming. I now understand why Step reckoned the only way to prevent war is to shoot all generals and higher ranks the moment the last shot is fired. He has something, for

once, that bloke, though he sucks up to Generals in his rag just the same.

I'll see the kids and Zanny again on Sunday. They're all great fun, but of course, Zanny's older which makes her more interesting though the kids are crackerjack too. There's not a thing they don't know about the fish and the lobsters and crabs and the anemones and all the rest of it that live around the cliffs of Whaler's. I only wish I had my underwater gear here, but that'd make things a bit too open, and I've got to keep up this medical jazz as long as I can.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sunday night. You wouldn't read about it, as Blue says. You certainly wouldn't think it could happen to an unlucky kind of bloke like me, but I met Zanny's family today. It happened this way. It's the Kolonel's weekend for the 'Big Smoke'—that's what Blue calls Sydney. The Captain always spends Sundays with his Sheila (again Blue) in the township. The rest of us dribble where we like and do what we like so long as we do our Duty to God in the morning and eat up the foul midday mess that's always worse on Sunday because the Cooks get liquored-up on Saturday night.

But back to Zanny's family. I got down to the beach late afternoon as usual on Sunday and was a bit stricken to see nobody in the Saucer. Nobody that is but the kids, not that they aren't great fun, but they're a bit young for me. Then just as we were splasing each other, and Viking was doing his hysterical act, Toffee, the littlest one, shouted: 'Here's grandpa coming.'

And sure enough coming down the track through the banana grove was a tall, black man, at least he looked black in that light, and I might say he also looked nine feet high, and I wondered if he was after my blood though there seemed no reason why he should except that I was definitely breaking all the rules of Whaler's as well as those of the camp. He stood on the edge of the water with the little waves washing his big sailor's feet that look as useful as another pair of hands.

'You'd better come out and meet him,' Larry said. So I swam till the water got shallow then limped out feeling a bit the way I did when the Head used to send for me and I was getting ready for a dressing-down or a blowing-up.

He's taller than me, thin but wiry, and his hair curls all over his head, grey and black mixed. His eyes in deep holes bored into me like an X-ray, and his teeth, big and white, bit on the edge of the stem of an old pipe. His white shirt made his throat look darker and I thought I'd never seen a more dignified man in my life, boots or not. I surprised myself by saying:

'Good afternoon, sir,' 'sir' being something I hate and use only under pressure. Why should you 'sir' people just because they're older and usually the sillier for it?

He said, 'Lo, son. I'm Bert Swanberg, Zanny's father.' He put out a big long hand and mine disappeared in it.

I didn't wonder then, but I do now, why I didn't resent him calling me son. Maybe because he did it in such a friendly way—not like my father who does it to push down my neck the idea that begetting me gives him some right to demand that I should do something or other, which I never do.

'We're grateful to you for helping us out about Viking, son. We're sorry for what he did to you and he's sorry for it.'

Viking was doing his head-on-front-paws act just to keep in the picture.

'Don't mention it,' I said. 'It was a pleasure,' at which everybody burst out laughing again. I'd never met such a place for laughing.

'Zanny's been kept at the hospital so I've come down to ask you up to have a drink of tea with us.'

I couldn't think of anything to say but 'Thanks awfully, I'd like to, but my clothes are up on the beach.' Trunks didn't seem the thing in which to go visiting, particularly when you wanted to give a good impression, though why the lord I should want to make a good impression for the first time in my life I couldn't say.

'Larry will run back and get them,' he said.

Larry was off like a streak with the others running behind him and Viking, getting a late start, gradually passing them all over the causeway.

We went up the path through the banana plantation and stopped at the beginning of the mangoes to watch the kids coming back in the same order and at the same speed, but with Viking in the lead.

I climbed into my clothes—an old shirt, and a pair of rather moth-eaten shorts. I was a bit sorry that I hadn't put on my best shirt and slacks but nobody seemed to mind.

The north side of Whaler's is really like the rim of a saucer, a regular sun-trap where bananas and mangoes were ripening and pineapples pushing up from their spiny palms (I don't know if that's the word) and green and yellow pawpaws hanging close into their trunks in a rather uncomfortable way as though melons had suddenly started to grow on trees.

When the path comes out of the plantation you're on a sloping plateau about a quarter of a mile long and two thirds the width where everything grows madly. Fruit trees

and vegetable gardens—big yellow and red flowers growing everywhere with white goats tethered on the velvety green grass and the white house on the far cliff where some Norfolk pines defy all the winds that blow.

We went through a side door into an enormous room that has glass all round and looks rather like the bridge of a ship. In an enormous armchair at the other end with his eye glued to a telescope was an enormous fat old man with a round red face and a mop of white hair.

I felt a bit like I was being presented to royalty when we went up to him and Bert said: 'Cap'n this is Christopher Armitage,' and the old man turned around and put down the telescope, stared at me with the sharpest bluest eyes almost invisible in rolls of fat and growled in a throaty accent so I nearly jumped: 'Ho, so you're de boy?'

Then before I could open my mouth to ask him what the hell he thought I was—a sea-horse? (I wouldn't have dared really) he put out a big paw and grabbed mine and shook it till I thought it would come off at the wrist, saying, 'Tanks, lad, for saving our dog. I don't approve of lying in general but a lie in a good cause is a different matter, and we appreciate it. Make yourself at home.'

I did, and the next couple of hours were a whirl in which I met Zanny's mother (Aunt Eva to everybody), who was a kind of darker cocoa-colour with a nice merry way about her.

I could tell the Captain liked having someone new to tell his life-story to.

It was a queer story. He'd been a sailor on a Swedish whaling ship and was left on Whaler's as a kind of watchman and caretaker when he broke a leg right back at the beginning of the century. The ship was going to pick him up on its way back from the Antarctic but nobody ever heard anything about it again, so he stayed here, having got



a taste of being master of his own house and a taste of the sun, too. There he met Suzannah an Aboriginal woman and they got married. 'And a better woman never lived.'

That was the beginning of the family on Whaler's. He taught her how to cook in the Swedish fashion, and keep house in the Swedish fashion, and they had a son—he was killed in New Guinea in the last war—and a daughter who was Zanny's mother who married Bert who came to live there and they had two children—May who looked old enough to be Zanny's mother, and Zanny who was born when they'd given up thinking about having any more family. May was married to Paul and the kids were their children. They're all called Swanberg. Bert and Paul took the name of Swanberg when they got married. A nice idea. I wouldn't mind it myself.

I liked the house from the moment I stepped inside. There were windows everywhere and glimpses of the sea and all the time you heard the waves booming on the cliffs below.

The whole house had the scrubbed feeling of a ship. The floor was waxed and polished till it shone, and the tables and chairs were of plain wood. I understood why it had this shippy atmosphere when the Captain told me that all the wood-work and the furniture came from a sailing ship that piled up on the rock in a terrific storm one night.

It was a happy house. Everybody talked and laughed at once.

Toffee, the smallest child sat on the Captain's enormous lap—I don't know how there was room for anything but his big belly—and joined in the conversation too. They only stopped when the Captain spoke, and he doesn't speak, he shouts, so that all other voices seemed soft beside his. I think he shouts because he's learned to shout when he was

at sea on a windjammer because nobody seems frightened of him at all.

His legs are paralyzed but he doesn't let anybody talk about it and goes around the house and the island in the wheelchair which Jed fixed up for him.

Jed is a bit of a mystery. He seems to be able to do everything from growing fruit to making wheelchairs, but he didn't appear.

We had a terrific meal of lobster. Then there was a super fruit salad with cream that was whiter than usual and I thought must have come from the goats. There was ginger beer and hop beer all home made. Only the old man drank a liquid out of a bottle which had Swedish punch on it.

I hardly seemed to have arrived before Bert leaned over me and said, 'It's time to go, Son.' And I got up, shook hands with the Captain, thanked everybody and went and only when I was outside did I realize that Zanny hadn't turned up. I was hurrying across the causeway as fast as I could with my ankle still rickety when she came running up the beach, and the wind blew her dress against her so that she looked like a line picture of a huntress and I stopped a minute to say 'Sorry, I'm late,' and she said, 'Sorry, I'm late,' and I went though I wanted to stay, but I wasn't going to risk not being able to come back again.

When I got up to the top of the sandhill the jeep was just chugging around the lagoon, and I sat down behind a skraggly shrub so that I could wave to her without Blue seeing me. And there she was on top of the island her white dress whipping in the wind, and I slid down the other side of the sandhill feeling as warm inside as though I'd been drinking the Captain's punch.

The Captain and Aunt Eva are two of the most wonderful people I've ever met, and that goes for Bert, too. Zanny's older sister May doesn't seem to be quite in this world, a bit shy like a bird always ready to take off. She hardly ever speaks and is always working madly but when everybody else is enjoying themselves she'll smile and nod her head and her big eyes—a bit like Zanny's only sadder—laugh too. If she doesn't talk much her husband Paul makes up for it. He's very dark and broad and has a kind of sarcastic way of looking at me with his head cocked on one side saying things about white people that get my back up even though I agree with them. He has a horrible racking kind of cough that he says is from all the cigarettes he smokes but Zanny told me that he got blown up in New Guinea by a Jap bomb and has something wrong with his lungs. He helps to take out the fishing boat with Bert and his cousin George from the Aboriginal Reserve who takes the fish to the township to sell. As far as I could see nobody on Whaler's except Zanny and the kids go there.

The Captain has been crippled since some time during the last war when he laid out with a belaying pin a couple of fellows who were chasing May. Half a dozen of their mates lay in wait for the old bloke when he was coming home one night, grabbed him just as he was going across the Causeway and nearly kicked him to death. Damaged his spine, and he hasn't been able to walk ever since. After that, Whaler's and the beach for two hundred yards of each side of the causeway was put out of bounds.

I forgot to say earlier that an old parson in Wallaba, the township a mile or so along the South Wallaba beach, is a friend of the Captain's and I got in the habit of dropping in there so I'd have an alibi during my time off. A nice bloke but an awful bore, who'll go on for hours telling me the history of the district and puffing smoke out of a stinking

pipe. The only history of the district I'm interested in is about Whaler's, and at least I gather a good bit about the place and the people from him.

'A decent family the Swanbergs,' he said. 'I used to teach the young ones before they were admitted to the Public School. I wanted some of them to go on to High School, but there were difficulties. Not everybody around here is broad-minded enough to give the original owners of the country a fair go.' That made me like him. He was glad enough to see me, but not sorry when I went. I think he likes his own company best like lots of old people who have enough to interest them. Not like Aunt Lilian who needs people to live with.

He lends me his bike so I can sprint to Whaler's along the track at the edge of the beach in less time than it takes to write it. I haven't got to put on an act at Whaler's. Everybody accepts me just as I am and the women don't apologize for being in the kitchen with flour on their hands or the men for being up their eyes painting the boat or the house. I just go in, swallow down some of Aunt Eva's hop-beer—she soon became my aunt—and wallop cakes—she's a crackerjack cook—and then I ask if there's anything I can do and find myself doing it.

Most often, I'll admit, I swim around in the pool with the kids or go down the steep cliff track to where bits of the old wreck are on a shelf of rock where you get the best fish. If Zanny is home she comes with us. We stagger back up the cliff with the fish we've caught and the house is soon full of the smell of fish frying and kids skittering in and out of the bathroom and getting ready for bed and then the Captain will be wheeled to the head of the big table and we'll all sit down to tea, and for the first time in my life I understand why they say Grace before meals.

I've been making discoveries, Dear D., and the main one is that the old bozos who spout about family life are right.

I've always thought it was another of those fakes—Join-the-Family-and-get-on-in-the-world—but now I found out that a family is a nice thing to have and maybe that's what I've been missing all my life.

I'm well aware that the family I've developed wouldn't help me to get on in the world. The wrong colour. What gets me is the things that some of the blokes here say about people who aren't their colour. There's an Aboriginal Reserve on the other side of the township and they talk about the people there as though they were muck. I had an argument in the canteen and we nearly had a blue. Only Jim and Curtin were on my side. It all started because the S.M. reckoned that Hitler had the right idea about Blacks and that if he had his way he'd treat them the way they do in South Africa. Most of the blokes'd give any man a fair go whatever his colour, but there were only Jim and Curtin and me to open our mouths whereupon the S.M. said we were troublemakers and reds which Jim said is *not* argument.

\* \* \* \* \*

'No, it's not argument, Chris,' Tempe said, laying down the book. 'But you were too young to know that there are reactions stronger than the best arguments.'

So Zanny was the black girl he loved. Six years ago! She remembered as clearly as though it was yesterday the disgust that had crept over her as she listened to the Colonel telling the story with Christopher standing beside him as

though caught in a crime. Once it seemed that he would strike the Colonel when he called Zanny's family a tribe of half-castes, sired by a drunken old sailor. Only Robert's move had prevented him. They were horrified at the change in their too-quiet son. Both agreed—and it was rarely they agreed on anything—that his contact with those awful people had had the worst possible effect on him. What madness was it, they asked each other, that had got him into an entanglement with a half-caste?

'A tart,' the Colonel had called her. She remembered again the sense of actual nausea with which she had heard the Colonel's statement and Christopher's incoherent passionate pleading. 'She's not. Come and meet her for yourself. Then judge. Come and meet them all, all of you. You don't know anything about them. You've never seen them, you've never been on Whaler's.'

'I've heard enough about them,' the Colonel shouted. 'I don't need to go. I know what a reputation they have in the camp and in the town. We had to put the place out of bounds for the sake of the young soldiers.'

'It's a lie,' Christopher shouted back. 'It's a lie, and you know it's a lie. Whaler's was put out of bounds because the soldiers tried to rape the Captain's daughter. Hasn't a man the right to defend his daughter?'

'Don't be so ridiculous, Christopher,' she remembered saying. 'The Colonel knows more about the history of the camp than you do.'

'But he doesn't know more about Whaler's. And every word he said about the people there is a lie.'

She had been amazed then—indeed she never ceased to be amazed—at the way he had defended them. Her flesh had crept at the thought of her own son being entangled with one of those dirty, depraved creatures she had seen when she and Keith had driven to Wallaba. Creatures in

shabby clothes, bare feet shuffling through the dust, dark eyes peering timidly through unkempt hair. What could there be to attract a young man who had the choice of a hundred nice, well brought-up girls?

She told herself that if it happened today she would not behave quite like that. She would be against his marriage but she would try to understand. But would she? 'Be honest,' she said. 'Do you only tell yourself that now because your son is safely dead?'

She wondered as she lay thinking back on that terrible time, how most people would have behaved in their situation. Robert's service in Egypt and a brief experience of the Aborigines in Darwin had given him a rabid attitude. You couldn't argue with him about coloured people. They weren't human, that's all there was to it. At the best like wilful children, at the worst potential thieves and murderers.

Six years ago her reaction was as unthinking. If she was more reasonable now it was because in the past years she had met Asians and Africans as civilized, educated people doing university courses and her ingrained prejudices had been shaken. How would she feel if today Christopher wanted to marry one of them? She couldn't answer the question. Even though she had grieved for him and blamed herself for her part in his being sent away, she had never really questioned the rightness of her reaction to the threat of his marriage to an Aboriginal girl. She had never asked herself what kind of black girl Christopher—too sensitive, too critical—would love to the point of wanting to marry her. He was prepared to risk anything, everything: the anger of his father and his mother, punishment by his commanding officer, and eventually ostracism from his own world because he could never have brought any kind of Aborigine girl into the world in which he'd been accus-

tomed to move and in which his future would lie. She'd always pushed the thought away from her till now, hating the unknown girl for a slut who had bewitched her son with some dark witchcraft out of a primitive race. She had wept for his foolishness and his stubbornness and his death, but now she realized she should also have wept for her own failure to understand.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Diary, it suddenly dawns on me that I haven't written a thing here for ages. Here is mid-May with the southerly whipping up the coast and the air full of the thunder of the surf on the other side of the Hogsback and me living two lives, one of them as the K.'s pet and the M.O.'s darling—both of them are still windy for fear that report of mine will eventually catch up with them via Step though they don't know that Step is only out for justice when it will bring a lot of publicity to the paper. And what publicity would I bring?

Of course, it couldn't go on for ever. After six weeks of it not even I could pretend to be limping, and when it was suggested that I should go to another camp where I could get thero-something treatment and what-have-you, I suddenly recovered overnight. For the first time in my life I've found somewhere where I wanted to stay and I'm astonished to find how much cunning I have getting my own way. Up till now I've just sat back in the britching, (Blue's remark again) and even if they'd lit a fire under me you couldn't have moved me.

Now I've decided I can do the usual parade and drill,



but my ankle isn't strong enough for route marches or commando warfare and if I know anything about it, is never going to be. I worked a swiftie on him by telling the doctor that if I walk too far the nerves where Kyber's teeth sunk into my ankle pain dreadfully, and that's enough to give the K. shudders and the M.O. jitters. So I've settled down to the ordinary routine—with a night off in the week where I can go where I like and the usual free Sunday afternoon except on the occasions when I have to take my turn on guard duty, and an occasional weekend.

I've stopped going to the beach because the M.O. said in my convalescent condition the winds are too cold for me and it isn't wise for me to swim at this time of the year. God damn him! So I spend my mental energy nutting out how I can get to Whaler's again and when.

It's a wonderful place Whaler's. You have the feeling everybody loves everybody and wants everybody, and I even have the feeling that they want me. I feel as though I've started living for the first time as 'me', as though all my bits and pieces were suddenly being put in one bundle and sewn up neatly so that I'm not flopping all over the place any more. Nobody can ever take that from me again!

\* \* \* \* \*

The Colonel's been crawling to me. Seems he met my Legal at a R.S.L. binge, and he's asked me if I wouldn't like to go to an Officers Training School, and I said No! I didn't say the only place I want to go to is Whaler's—and believe it or not, I get there pretty often.

It happened this way. The Captain is mad on Astronomy, hence the big telescope. He observes the stars in all their movements and has a lot of interesting theories and—thanks to Withers—I can at least look intelligent. Zanny draws the nattiest little star-maps for him showing movements of the planets beginning with the moon and going out to the farthest one he can pick up with his telescope. One night at tea when I was there there was a bit of an argument going on between him and Jed about light-years and they both got bogged down in the calculations and I, snatching a chance to show off a bit (I have little enough to show off about) corrected them. Everybody got madly excited when they found I could do the calculations that boggled even the Captain, and so the old boy then and there invited me to look at the stars with him.

That means I spend all my time off on Whaler's. I've got so cunning about it I hardly recognize myself and I'm going on doing it—whatever Jed threatens.

That's a weird business, D.D. It happened like this when I was hopping over to Whaler's last night. The moon was just coming up like a big yellow egg as I tore across the causeway because the tide was just beginning to wash over it.

I nearly fell into the sea when a figure stepped out from the shadows and I had a crazy memory of the Captain with the belaying-pin but it was Jed, and I wondered what he wanted. I'm a bit nervous of Jed.

He said: 'Goodnight, Chris. Thought I'd wait and walk up with you.'

Then I felt his good hand under my elbow hard as a motor-jack.

'Half a minute,' he said. 'I want to have a word with you.'

He flicked a cigarette out of a packet at me and I took it

and we lit up, and I began to get butterflies in my stomach wondering what the heck was wrong.

'Now listen, Chris.' His voice was like a bayonet jabbing into a dummy. 'This family here is a good family.'

'I know that,' I said, on the defensive.

'That may be so. But they don't usually take in strangers the way they've taken you. You got into their good graces by saving Viking and by being able to calculate star-distances. Now, so far as I'm concerned they're not necessarily references about your character.'

I felt myself crawl because I haven't got much of an opinion of my character either.

'I just wanted to drop a word in your ear. If you do anything to hurt anyone on Whaler's I'll kill you. And don't think I'm being funny.'

The sawdust ran out of me as the jabs went home. Then suddenly I got blazing mad. I pulled myself away from him and my voice was shaking as I said: 'And who the devil do you think I am to want to hurt anyone on Whaler's?'

'Maybe that's what you think now, but you come from a different world from theirs.'

'I hate my world.'

'That also may be so, but I've been doing a bit of checking up on you and you've got a bit of a high-flying background, haven't you?'

'Now look here, Jed.' I began, feeling for the first time that I'd like to do something, but with the sawdust running out of me I hadn't enough strength to do it. I wanted to be furious but I was only miserable at the thought of losing the one thing I ever really wanted.

'I swear—' I began.

'I don't want you to swear. Men always swear, and they mean it at the time but most of them break their oaths. All I say is: be careful. If you hurt Zanny...' He stopped and

the words twanged up and down in my mind so that I kept hearing them as though they were being repeated on a tape-recorder. 'If you hurt Zanny...'

Then I got really mad. 'I wouldn't hurt Zanny for—for—anything.'

'Maybe,' Jed's voice jabbed. 'Just don't, that's all.'

I followed him up the path and over the plateau and I could have blubbered to see that sprawling old white house whiter than ever in the moonlight, the sea spread out like silver paper and the air full of the boom of the waves. It was all so damned silly to be walking along in this big empty world behind a man who'd just told you he'd kill you and meant it. I wondered if I ought to go back, and then, as we got nearer, Viking and the kids came rushing out, and there was Zanny calling Hello, and Aunt Eva at the door waiting to give me a kiss, and I suddenly had a reckless feeling and knew that I'd stay even if I was going to be killed good and proper at the end of it.

When I arrive you'd think I was a lost son coming home. It's the only time in my life I ever felt like that. Everybody's nice to me—except Jed. It sounds a bit corny to say that I respect Jed even if I don't like him. I don't want to respect him but you can't help doing it when everybody else on the place is always Jed this and Jed that and Jed the other, but it'd be inhuman to like somebody who keeps his eye on you the whole time like a watchdog as though he was afraid you might carry off the flagpole. He's a long skinny fellow, looking like a bronze medallion from one side but horrible from the other. Zanny said he was terribly burnt up two or three years ago when there was an explosion at the Newcastle Steelworks where he was working to get his Engineering Diploma or something. Now he can't do that kind of work any more.

He's some kind of relation of Hope who sometimes

comes in the weekends. Both of them are terrifically well-educated. She's a dazzler and the place just about goes up in flames when she's there. She hasn't the kind of shyness that Zanny and May have. When she met me she looked me up and down as though she was weighing me inch by inch and if one inch was not up to specification whoosh—out I'd go! She's a cool kind of beauty with a kind of invisible fence around her and a touch-me-not air. There is even something a bit arrogant about her that I like when she throws back her head and laughs showing all her teeth that are good enough to be in a toothpaste ad.

She brings the outside world to Whaler's, and I've got a glimpse of a lot of things I never thought about or even heard about like Zanny winning a High School Bursary and not being able to take it because people in the next town made a fuss about her living in the Hostel there.

God damn our white supremacy ideas. You might as well be in the Deep South. Who are we to say Zanny and Larry aren't good enough to sit beside pimply white bodgies and widgies?

Jed's face isn't a very nice face to look at any time, but he got so angry when they talked about this that Aunt Eva put her arms around him and said: 'There, there, boy, things are getting better. If Larry works hard enough and gets a bursary he'll go to school to High School, you see.'

And I suddenly surprised everybody including myself by croacking: 'By crikey he will if I have to go and camp on the Director of Education's doorstep myself.'

Everybody clapped—except Jed.

He gave a look from me to the Captain and said: 'I'll clap the day we all go down and camp on the Director's door-step ourselves. We'll get nothing till we fight for it.'

Aunt Eva shushed and May looked frightened and the Captain bellowed: 'How many times have I got to tell

you, Jed, dat I won't have dis talk about fighting in my home? My grandchildren will get where dey want to wid-out any of your ideas.'

'Like Zanny being a wardsmaid instead of a nurse because she's Aboriginal?'

Aunt Eva shushed again and the Captain roared: 'I don't want my granddaughter nursing white men.'

I thought Zanny was going to cry and her father said in his soft voice: 'Get your guitar, Jed, and let's have some music.'

So we had music with Jed playing the guitar (he's a wizard at it) and Paul blowing a mouth-organ and the little ones making music on gum-leaves and everybody else singing all kinds of songs—a Swedish folk-song in which the Captain joined—and I went home at last with it ringing in my head.

\* \* \* \* \*

Funny, I always thought black people must be uncomfortable about being dark, but I found out they're not. Evidently the Captain's drummed it into them all to be proud of being coloured and they are—proud as hell. This is one of Paul's grudges against the Government's 'assimilation policy'. He growls, but not in front of the Captain: 'Who wants to be assimilated? I'm black and I like my colour. All I ask is that my kids have the same rights as the kids of any dirty drunken white no-hoper.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Well D.D. here I am at the end of another week going to tell you about the most marvellous weekend I've ever spent. The Captain invited me for the week-end to see an eclipse of the moon.

I wired off to T.T. to ask him if he could get me a good map of the latest pictures of the moon (the one the Captain had was an old one and a bit of a blotch) and good old T.T. reliable as ever, airfrated it and a new book about it up to me. So all spit and polish off the Whaler's I went announcing to the camp that I was going to spend the week end with the Parson and there were a lot of loud questions about whether he didn't have a granddaughter in the cupboard.

When I arrived there was so much fuss about the map of the moon that you'd thought I'd brought the moon itself, and when I handed over to Aunt Eva the biggest box of chocolates I could buy everybody oo-oo'd and ah-ah'd and laughed and thanked me, and I begin to feel twice life-size.

I've never spent a night like that in my life. I never will again because there'll never again be a *first* time when we all sit in the glassed-in room with the light out, everyone down to the littlest having a peep at the moon through the telescope and the Captain's voice booming as he tells us all about what happens in an eclipse. Funny, in all my years of being expensively educated nobody had ever explained an eclipse to me like that. The only light on the verandah was on the map of the moon which Jed illuminated with a big torch, standing beside it with a pointer. As the earth's shadow traveled over the moon the Captain with his eye to the telescope boomed out the names of the parts that the shadow was touching.

I never thought there were such lovely names: Mare Foecunditas, Mare Nectaris, with Jed's voice cutting in

lighter and sharper as he translated the Sea of Fertility, the Sea of Nectar, the Sea of Clouds and the Captain explaining they were ancient names. Now they know they aren't seas but plains. Then telling us about the mountains and craters and was I pleased to find a crater called after my old friend Copernicus!

As it got darker Viking lay with his head on his paws and whimpered and Toffee and Peter curled up and went to sleep. As the shadow travelled past the Ocean of Storms Jed's voice sounded so sharp on the word that I was shaken back to reality with the light of the torch catching Zanny's hair. When the whole moon was dark Jed switched off the torch. A queer brassy light was radiating from the edge of darkness; nobody breathed and I knew why some people beat gongs and drums to frighten away the dragon that's eating up the moon. Then May and Aunt Eva picked up the little ones, Jed strummed the guitar and when at last a snipping of light appeared on the dark moon everybody let out a cheer and Viking barked and you'd have thought we'd been all reprieved. Slowly the light came back and shone on Zanny in her white dress, dark and light, like the moon.

Next morning Bert took me out to go round the lobster traps. It was still dark when he called me and I was only half awake when I sat down to an enormous mug of milky coffee in the kitchen with Aunt Eva skittering about like on wheels. I scooped up half the porridge and got through half my eggs and bacon while Bert and Paul were through theirs altogether and carried my large slab of toast and butter and honey down to the boat with me.

Bert and Paul took the boat out without a sound except the puttering of the engine and the screaming of gulls. By then there was a light along the horizon and the wind went through my swetter and windcheeter. When we turned



into the quarter where the horizon was getting brighter every minute and skimmed over a sea that was smooth and yellowy like oil, I looked back to see Whaler's getting lighter and lighter till at last the sun lit up the old white house like a beacon and I found that quite suddenly it had become home to me.

I wondered what Bert and Paul were thinking, their dark faces and black eyes watching for the floats I was supposed to be watching for too.

But I was thinking that fishing would be an honest game by which to earn your living, using up your mussels while your mind was busy on mathematical speculation. Use my mussels I did and— though I didn't admit it —I was glad when Bert said we'd better go home because there was a storm coming up.

I slept all the afternoon and sure enough when I woke up the storm was there. The wind howled round the house and the breakers thundered on the rocks and the wind lashed the windows. I had a tiny little room on the south side not bigger than a ship's cabin and I had the feeling all the time that I was at sea, and once I woke up and imagined that the house itself was rolling.

The rain was still pouring when we got up next day, and we had breakfast round the big kitchen table. There were brass pots shining on the wall and porridge in big old blue and white soup plates that had been there as long as the house and a fire in the big black stove that warmed up the whole room.

That was a very wet weekend all the odder because the monsoon season was over.

Larry and I put on sou'westers and raincoats and went out to drag in piles of wood because it'd got cold with the southerly and we piled up an enormous fire of driftwood in the fireplace in the Captain's room. After that we went

down with Bert and Paul to pull the boats farther up in the Saucer for although it was sheltered the waves were running half way up the beach and everything was flying spray and swirling water. We helped Jed deepen a drain that carried the water away from the pineapple terraces and by then it was dinner time and we went back into the house soaked and I don't think I've ever been so hungry and happy in my life.

When we got through a terrific meal the Captain asked Zanny and me to sit down on each side of him and she went on with her diagrams of the sky and I with the calculations.

And so the weekend whizzed by faster than a comet and yet terribly long like light-years and I went away at last with Jed walking between Zanny and me down to the causeway and for a moment I wished that Zanny wasn't here and that I could have asked him what on earth put that idiotic idea into his head that I might ever in any way do any harm to Whaler's.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear D. I've taken you out, old friend, because for a moment I'm kind of walking on a presepice. The Parson told me last night that a friend of his told him to warn me that the Constable is going to report me to the Kolonel for going to Whaler's. Now my mind's all of a muddel and I don't know whether it's because I'm afraid I'll lose the only place I've ever really been myself or whether I'm afraid for the Swanbergs or whether I'm just in a funk about what'll happen to me.

That's all for now, D.D. I feel like a tight-stretched wire which doesn't make for writing.

\* \* \* \* \*

A week later. D.D., the bomb has dropped.

The way they marched me around with two M.P.'s you'd swear it was a court-martial. Blue says they can't court-martial me for being out of bounds. If they did they'd have to start with the Kolonel, work down through the Captain, the Loot and two-thirds of the troops. And one of the pubs the boys go to in their time off is also out of bounds because it's a pick up joint for the tarts who live in that end of the town, but the C O. turns a blind eye to that.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sydney. Three days later. It's worse than a court-martial. Out of respect for my father and mother, so the Kolonel said, (the old liar, it's respect for his own skin) he's had me up for a kind of personal inquisition, nothing official you know. It was the first time I've seen my parents together since Legal came home from the war eleven years ago. They sat glaring at each other, each blaming the other. My father's face said clearly, 'Of course, he takes after you'; and my mother, 'Look how you brought him up!' And they were both furious with me because whatever I've done or haven't done reflects on them. Nobody likes a delin-

quent son even if he's delinquent only for going out of bounds. Of course, that isn't the real trouble. That came out when finally the Kolonel accused me of having improper relations 'with an Abo servant girl from Whaler's'. I blew my top. I'd have laid him out there and then only that Legal grabbed me. I don't see why you can't lay an old man out just because you're young. He's protected by authority better than any young man is by his mussle. I was shaking all over and screaming all kinds of obsenities. Fortunately it was all inside.

When he said: 'Just one of the town tarts I'm afraid,' a voice I didn't recognize said: 'That's incorrect, sir. Suzannah Swanberg is my fiancée.'

If you could have knocked them over with a feather you could have knocked me over too. And I suddenly felt light-headed and terribly happy like the way I feel when a calculation comes out; and I knew that I hadn't said it merely because I was mad at them all but because only then I realized that I couldn't live without Zanny.

Everyone began talking at me at once and their eyes grew hard and I knew they were ganging up on me, not because they cared a damn what happened to me but because they feared for their own reputations.

The worst part of it all was that I realized that not one of them would have cared a damn if I had been sleeping with Zanny. It was that 'fiancée' that got them.

It was then, I think, that I stopped thinking of them as my mother and father, and saw them only as samples of that scungy, rotten hypocritical crowd that doesn't know the truth and won't look for fear they might learn it.

My blood was boiling at the way my mother squeaked: 'Oh, how horrible!'; and my father's grunt: 'I never thought a son of mine would come to this.'

'A half-caste!' I can still hear my mother's voice, shrill

as a parrot, her nose wrinkled up as though she had a bad smell under it, and my father's 'They inherit the worst of both races. I saw enough of those trash in Darwin.'

I looked at them both torn between hate and despair, sat back in the britching and refused to say a word.

I knew that anything I said would only make matters worse and all I was thinking of was how to save Zanny before their filthy tongues started dirtying her sea-clean mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Diary! Five days later and you won't believe it!

The Kolonel put me under a sort of house-arrest and my father guaranteed that he would be responsible for me and I was put on parole without having the faintest intention of keeping it. That night when my father went to a Returned Soldiers' dinner I rang up my mother and pleaded with her to come and meet Zanny as I've never pleaded with her for anything in my life. All she did was to get hysterical and put on an act bawling: 'I wash my hands of you. If you're not careful your father will have you sent to Malaya and it will be the one time in my life I'll be on his side.'

I rang off at last in disgust.

I stayed awake trying to read one of my books on Mathematics but not able to keep my mind on it, and when my father came home I went in and begged him to come up and meet Zanny and the people at Whaler's, but he just kept saying: 'I don't want to talk about it, son, it's too disgusting.'

I nearly dinged him one when he said: 'It's dishonourable to get a girl pregnant even if she is only a Black.' So I went back to bed thinking only pure-minded people can be so dirty.

I lay thinking of Zanny and trying to nut out something.

I did it next day when he'd gone to work, making me repeat my promise to stay in the house as though I was a delinquent kid instead of an eighteen-year-old soldier being trained to kill and to die for my country.

I took money from his desk and sneaked out while the housekeeper was having her after-lunch snooze. I'd put on an old school suit and covered it with my garberdene school raincoat and piled a few of my civvy clothes into a suitcase and left my uniform neatly spread out on my bed to infuriate my father.

It was a blustering winter day with squalls of rain sweeping out of the south and hitting my face like specks of ice. I huddled up in the corner of a second-class carriage and let my mind run ahead of me.

It was after midnight when I got out at Wallaba and the night-officer took my ticket without so much as a glance at me and swung his lantern along the platform and I walked out along the road to the Parson's house where the light was still on in his study. He opened the door to me when I knocked, looked at me hard, asked me in, poured a glass of hot milk and whisky into me and when I started to tell him everything, said: 'Go to sleep now, my boy. We'll talk about it in the morning.'

I went to sleep under a big fether quilt and had a queer dream full of stars that kept arranging themselves like numbers I was trying to calculate and woke up sweating and dazed. It was probably a combination of the whisky and the quilt. The blind was down, and I was surprised

when the Parson opened the door and brought me in a cup of strong tea and told me it was nine o'clock.

A cold shower (there was no alternative) woke me up, and over breakfast I told him everything. He kept peering at me and giving little grunts every now and then. I was lucky that this was Zanny's half-day at the hospital and so he rang up and asked her to call in on her way home because I had to keep out of sight.

When the rusty knocker sounded my heart flopped over and when she came in and said: 'Hello, Christopher,' in that gurgling kind of voice, I could have burst out crying. I didn't, and she just stood there looking at me, buttoned up in a white raincoat with the hood hiding her hair and I knew for certain that I meant what I'd said.

We sat down at the table that was so piled with books and newspapers that you could hardly find a place to put your elbows. Zanny was at the far end with her head outlined against the window so that I couldn't see the expression on her face and the Parson sat at the side between us like a referee and though I seemed to be talking to them both I was really talking to Zanny and I cursed myself that I didn't have any of the clever words that people use in books.

She was resting her chin in her hands so that her face looked more pointed than ever and her eyes were only darker shadows in her dark face. All the time the rain kept showering little handfuls of pellets against the window and when it stopped the wind kept a bare branch of some tree tapping against the pane like morse code.

I felt I was talking in morse code because the bare words I was using didn't give any clue to what was going on inside me with the way my stomach was tying itself up in knots and my heart beating too fast and my voice sounding tinny in my ears.

Zanny never moved and the afternoon got darker so that I might have been talking to a shadow only I wasn't. I heard her draw in her breath sharply like you do when you've got a stitch in your side when I mumbled out the bit about saying she was my fiancée, and I couldn't go on for a bit after that because there was such a lump in my throat and my heart swelled up and I wanted to shout, 'I mean it, I mean it, Zanny.' But I couldn't because the Parson was there and he sat biting on his old pipe nodding his head and sometimes darting sharp glances from me to Zanny and from Zanny to me, and when I got to the end of it, we all sat without saying anything.

Then I saw my hand sticking out from the end of my old school suit and a couple of inches of wrist and realized that it was not only too tight for me but too short and I thought what a freck I must look and was glad I couldn't see Zanny's eyes because I was sure they'd be full of pity and I didn't want pity

Just when I thought I couldn't bear it any more the Parson took his pipe out of the place where it rested in the tooth it had worn down over the years and said: 'And what are you going to do now?'

A voice like a ventriloquist croaked out: 'I want to marry Zanny.'

The Parson turned his face full on me, and looked at me right through, and I wiggled like a dragonfly I once put on a pin when I was a kid only now I was the insect on the pin.

'You're both too young,' he said at last, 'and I'm sure your mother and your father would not give you permission. And I think the Captain would refuse to let Zanny marry you, even if she wanted to.'

'Do you want to marry him, Zanny?'

She said 'Yes' in a beautiful strong voice that echoed



round the room and rang against the window and made fireballs in the air. My heart blew up like a rocket going off and then began to beat steadily again.

‘I couldn’t do it,’ he said.

I saw my one chance in life disappearing and suddenly I went mad. I can only thank my father for the idea, I’d never have thought of it otherwise, and I said: ‘But, sir, you’ll have to. Zanny’s pregnant.’

The Parson bit so hard you could hear his teeth close on the pipe. Then he looked at Zanny and said in a stern kind of voice: ‘Is that true, Zanny?’

She said, ‘Yes,’ only this time in a voice not much more than a whisper and I hated myself for bringing this shame on her even if it wasn’t true, when she was always clean like sea-spray.

The Parson drew a long sigh and then said, slowly: ‘Then I suppose there’s nothing else for it. We’d better get it over before you tell your grandfather, because that would kill him.’

So we were married in that little room with the dry branch tapping at the window. Zanny in the white overall she wore at work and me in the school suit that was too tight and too short. I didn’t have a ring and the Parson went to his desk and got an old very wide one with a signet on it. He said he’d worn it on his little finger when he was a young man but his finger had grown too fat for it so it wasn’t too bad on Zanny’s hand.

When it was over he made us sign our names in the witnesses’ book and said: ‘And what are you two young weddedds going to do now?’

I said: ‘I’ve got six days before the military come for me again and I want to spend them a’l with Zanny.’

‘But where?’ he said. ‘I don’t think you’ll be very popular at Whaler’s till I’ve cleared things up a bit, and

there's no decent hotel on the north coast that would take you both.'

'I know,' Zanny cried out. 'Jed's shack down at Bogga Beach where he goes when he gets fed up with us all. I know where he hides the key.'

The Parson asked me: 'Have you got a licence? I mean, a driving licence.'

'Yes,' I said, thinking that one more white lie wouldn't matter since I didn't have it with me.

'Then you can take my old Ford. Zanny knows the road.'

So there we were driving along a bush track in the dark with the sound of the sea dumping on the beaches audible above the engine of what must have been one of the oldest cars in the country. But it went all right and we bounced over stones and jogged over korduroy stretches and crawled through a swollen creek and I was busy keeping my mind on the road and dodging the walabies that sat up with their eyes red in the one headlight and koping with the gears—I'd never driven with such gears—to have any time to spare for the extraordinary fact that I was driving on my honeymoon with my supposedly pregnant wife beside me whom I hadn't even kissed.

This only really began to worry me after we'd lit the kerosene lamp in the shack and put a match to the fire that was set in the rough stone fireplace and I found that the shack was only one room and one bunklike bed. Zanny whizzed round like a katherine wheel, pulling sheets and blankets out of a chest and making the bed, telling me to do this and do that, and I pretended to be interested in the fire and piled on more and more logs and the smell of gum-smoke mixed with the smell of rain and when everything was fixed up I made an excuse and shot outside to let Zanny get undressed.

The rain had stopped but thunder clashed and terrific

lightning jagged the clouds right down to the horizon lighting up the sky and the white tops of the breakers and the empty beach and the thick bush along its edge.

Then it was all blacker than ever till the next flash lit up everything with its queer bluish light. This time the picture stayed in my eyes like a negative showing up things I didn't know I'd seen—driftwood littering the beach and wind ripples on the sand and when I closed my eyes dark streaks flickered as though the lightning had made a print on the retina.

I saw the lamp in our window and I thought of Zanny waiting for me and I panicked. I could have kicked myself for all the opportunities I'd missed to muck around with girls. Like every other eighteen-year-old I had the theory of it all right, but I didn't even know how to kiss a girl properly, much less anything else and here was I wandering up and down the beach with the wind battering me, thunder crashing on top of my head, lightning flashing on and off, and wishing I'd never got myself into this fix. Then I got ashamed of myself and thought of Zanny in there all alone wondering what had happened to me and I screwed up my courage and went and knocked at the door ready to blurt out: 'Zanny, I don't know what to do.' When I opened the door, there she was kneeling by the fire, wrapped up in a blanket with one arm stretched out to put a bunch of dry gum leaves on the fire. I saw from the startled way she looked up at me that she was as panicked as I was so I went over and kissed her (our noses got in the way) the blanket slipped down as the leaves flared up and the flames showed her dark lovely body. And then I knew.

Four days later. Dear Diary, Zanny has just read everything up to here. I let her read you because I wanted to see if when she knew what I really was she'd still feel the same about me and she says she does only more so. She says she's very grateful to you for telling her so much about me.

She asked me if I was going to write about our time here together and I said no. I understood now why writers put asterisks when they've got to that part, not because there's anything to be ashamed of but because there aren't any words that come near to the reality. What's happened and is happening is between Zanny and me and nobody else. All I'm going to write is that I've got the feeling for the first time in my life that I've come home. Home is the place where they want you no matter what kind of bloke you are, and Zanny is my home. Nobody ever wanted me like this before. I don't mean just *that*. That's only part of it, like the terrific moment when calculations begin to solve themselves on their own. I mean all the little things we do together like making a fire and dashing into the surf and running along the beach and walking in the bush and oh, everything. Up till now I've always been in a kind of vakuum. My mother preferred Step to me, and my father preferred my mother to me. Now Zanny wants me for myself.

I told her how in the Middle Ages lovers used to write Amicable Numbers on paper and eat them so they'd love each other for ever. (Crikey I've written love.) And Zanny said: 'Let's do it,' and I wrote the numbers on a piece of good old Diary and we chewed them up, and swallowed them though I don't believe in this superstitious bilge and we don't need anything to keep in love.

Loving Zanny's like lightning. Even when it's over the light stays with me. I call her my Black Lightning because she makes me see the world as I've never seen it before.

All kinds of knots have come untied in me this week. One important one: I no longer hate my parents. If this—even only a little bit of it—was what my mother felt for Step, then I forgive her. And if my father felt when he lost her as I'd feel if I lost Zanny, then I forgive him too. I don't need them any more. I've got Zanny. If they want their son back they must take Zanny, too.

I've got a reason for working now. When this infernal National Service is over I'll come back here to Zanny and work so that her people who are now my people, AND OUR CHILDREN will have the chances white people have.

Now she's going to write her name, Dear Diary. Look! Suzannah Swanberg Armitage. (I wanted the Swanberg in.) Address: Paradise

\* \* \* \* \*



## PART THREE

THE plane hurtled down the runway and they were airborne. Tempe leaned against the window watching Sydney unfold in a jig-saw puzzle of red-roofed houses, blue bays fringed by a indented harbour line, and the vast blue Pacific. The tree-covered hills of the Peninsula dividing the glittering arm of Pittwater from the sea was only a panorama across which skimmed the memory of yachting with Keith. It had no power to sting.

Her eyes slid to the ever-receding horizon under a cloudless sky, a crystalline world in which the past fell away and the future had no form.

She opened her purse and took out the envelope containing the letter, shaken again as she had been shaken when she found it pinned into the back of Christopher's diary. She unfolded the page from an exercise book and re-read it with an incredulity that had barely lessened since she first saw the opening words: 'Dear Grandmother ...'

The unformed writing followed the ruled lines painstakingly.

'Dear Grandmother, My father told my mummy that if ever she needed help you would help her. Now we need help badly. Will you help us? Your loving Granddaughter. Kristina.'

The word had been mis-spelt, crossed out and written again with exaggerated care. She put the note away, leaned

back and watched, unseeing, coastal lakes gleaming among dark bushland, the froth of foam along the scalloped beaches, the smoke rising from tall stacks.

She was exhausted, now that the pressure was over: the rush of leaving the hospital, packing a suitcase, catching the plane. And ringing Robert to tell him about the letter. That had left a nasty taste. For the first time in sixteen years she had rung him. How typical Christopher would have found his first reaction: 'Oh, so that's where his pension went. I thought you were getting it.'

'And I thought you had it.'

'I've been out of this since he was killed so don't think you're going to involve me in the sordid business again. I don't care whether he married the gin or not. That only makes it worse. I'm not going to shoulder a six-year-old disgrace now.'

'You're mad,' he said when she tried to argue with him, and hung up.

She closed her eyes and, for the first time since she had made the sudden decision, she began to question it. Was she mad as Robert said? For him the existence of a grandchild was a disgrace. For her it had seemed salvation. It had dragged her from the depths of depression. Given her a reason for living. Now with Robert's contemptuous dismissal echoing in her ears she began to wonder.

What desperate need had made Zanny reveal Kristina's existence after six years of silence? What would she find herself involved in?

The people she seemed to know already from Christopher's diary began to take shape and she was afraid, particularly of Zanny. Would she see in her eyes the same hatred as in Christopher's?

They came out of the mist above Wallaba and the plane made a wide circle. Clearly, as though she was seeing



with Christopher's eyes, she saw the green skillion of Whaler's island by the tide and washed by a sea the colour of washing blue.

The airport stretched below them with the wind sock extended to its fullest in the high wind. She noted everything carefully to keep her mind from what lay ahead. The plane taxied across the flattened grass and when they drew to a stop she fumbled unnecessarily with her seat-belt rather than look across to the cluster of people waiting before the weatherboard building. She wanted to delay the meeting to which she had rushed so precipitately and rashly.

Now that it was too late her mind screamed: 'Go back, go back.'

This was the moment that would commit her to life without hope of escape. She had failed Christopher. She could not fail his daughter.

She got up slowly. The time for choice was over. She set her face in the half-smile that registered well with photographers. She smiled automatically at the hostess, thanked her and went down the landing steps. She kept the smile on her face as she walked across the tarmac, pretending to struggle with the zipper of her handbag to delay the moment when she must look into black faces looking at her out of hostile eyes. She steeled herself to hide the revulsion she feared would show on her face.

As she went through the gateway the sound of her name shattered her pretended composure. She looked up and fact shook her more than imagination. Between a well-dressed dark woman and an old white man, a child—Christopher's child—startled black eyes in an exquisite honey-brown face.

The old man stood holding his hat in his hand and gave her a stiff bow. 'Mrs Caxton, I am David McDonald, the

minister who celebrated the wedding of your son to Zanny. This is your granddaughter, Kristina.'

The child's lips quivered. She sank her teeth into her lower lip the way Christopher used to when he was trying not to cry and put up a hand to brush back the dark curly hair. The movement swept away all the differences of time and years. It was Christopher's gesture, the shape of *his* ear and, in a rush of emotion, she put an arm round the child's shoulders and drew the rigid little body to her. A camera clicked. Photographers even here!

She could feel the child's heart beating light and swift as a bird's as she pulled back to avoid being kissed. Tempe released her with a pang, feeling as though she had been rebuffed in an extravagant gesture.

'And this is Mrs Bauer, Kristina's Auntie Hope.'

The woman made her a brief inclination of the head and fixed her with challenging eyes.

After the first moment no words were exchanged. As they walked to the car all three kept their eyes firmly ahead as though they were extending her courtesy only until they had come to a decision about her.

What did they want of her, she asked herself, irritably. Certainly not money. The clothes of the woman and of the child and the late-model car put that out of question. Certainly not favours. Their manner was not that of people seeking favours. What then?

Looking from one to the other, meeting the man's sharp look and the proud, cold glance of the woman, she felt confidence ooze from her. Before their assurance she asked herself if she had anything at all to give them.

As she got into the back of the car with the parson, Kristina hastened to take the seat beside Hope, kneeling with her chin on the back of it, fixing her grave eyes on her grandmother. Tempe had brought sweets but she dare not

offer them to this child with the elfin, questioning face.

Suddenly she wanted to laugh. It was all so unlike what she had expected: the modern Holden; Hope, her wavy black hair cut fashionably to her well-shaped head, her brown hands gripping the wheel competently, the faintly contemptuous lift of her mouth; Kristina, pretty and well cared-for in a jumper and pleated skirt. Everything was unlike what she had expected.

What had she expected? A child out of some Save the Children poster? A woman out of an old-fashioned mission picture of native women in shapeless Mother Hubbards?

Hope turned and looked at the parson, her mouth curving in a wide smile that transformed her face. 'Where to, first?'

'My house. There we can talk.'

Kristina gave her a last long look when Hope told her to sit down on the seat. Her piercing whisper drifted back: 'She doesn't look like a grandma, does she?'

Hope hushed her.

Tempe leaned towards the parson, asking softly: 'Where is Zanny?'

'Dead.'

She drove to Wallaba as in a trance. And as in a trance took the chair at the head of the table in the book-lined study. Hope sat at the other end, her head outlined against the window as Zanny's had been. But Zanny was dead. Christopher was dead. And their child knelt on a chair, large liquid eyes fixed on the face of the woman who didn't look like a grandmother.

Tempe drank the strong tea, thinking that they were like passengers accidentally sharing tables in a railway refreshment room. But for the child, she would have wondered what she was doing there, for neither the man nor the woman made any attempt at a conversation that in-

cluded her. She wondered if they had brought her there to judge her. If that was so she would tell them that their judgment was unnecessary. She had already judged herself.

When she had refused a second cup the parson called Kristina to him. She came reluctantly and stood beside his chair while he told her that now they were going to talk to her grandmother—big people's talk—and that she should go out and play with the dog. She went without protest, standing a moment at the door to look back with disconcerting solemnity.

The parson waited till the door closed behind her. Then he turned and pinpointed Tempe with his pale blue eyes as he had once pinpointed her son. She shivered as though Christopher's ghost had come to stand beside her.

The old man stuffed the bowl of a meerschaum pipe with strong-smelling tobacco, following the movements of his pudgy, stained fingers intently. A spurt of irritation went through her. She took out her cigarettes, opened the packet and, flicking out a cigarette, offered it to Hope.

Hope shook her head. 'Thanks, I prefer my own.'

The three of them lit up in silence. The smell of strong pipe tobacco mingled with the lighter cigarette smoke and the spirals wavered in an imperceptible current of air. The seconds drew out and Tempe felt that time was a rubber band stretched to a point of intolerable strain. She imagined that it was Zanny's head silhouetted against the window where the same bare tree rattled its twigs—that Zanny whom she had rejected was looking at her out of Hope's implacable eyes.

The parson unlocked a drawer with a key from his watch-chain, took out a paper, unfolded it slowly, read it through his half-moon glasses and then pushed it slowly across the table to her.

She picked it up feeling her hands quiver as though it

carried some awful portent. It was a marriage certificate. Her eyes blurred as she read her son's scrawled signature 'Christopher Robert Armitage', and the precise handwriting of Suzannah Swanberg. The six-year-old date suddenly stretched the years into centuries so that all that it represented was as irretrievably gone as if it had been a thousand years away.

She felt the two pairs of eyes on her as she lingered over it, fighting with the sobs that rose in her throat and the tears that stung her lids, knowing that neither would bring her any sympathy.

The parson spoke at last. 'You will perhaps be wondering why we asked you to come here, Mrs Caxton. As you may have guessed, Kristy's letter to you was the outcome of a long consultation not only between Hope and me but among the family at Whaler's who have brought her up. If you have any doubts about the justice of the request we are going to make to you, this certificate will settle them. It proves that the child you have just acknowledged by your greeting to her—a greeting it would be unreasonable to expect her to reciprocate—is not only of your son's blood and your blood but legally your granddaughter.'

'I didn't need this to tell me. She has things about her—the shape of her ear and odd little gestures that are Christopher all over.'

'Yes, but that would perhaps not weigh with you. Half-caste illegitimate children are unfortunately not uncommon.'

'Before anything else, tell me—what happened to Zanny.'

The parson looked at Hope and they both looked back to Tempe. 'You must forbear. We had forgotten that you could not know the whole story. When you arranged for your son to be sent to Malaya . . .'

‘ Please! ’

‘ Then shall I say you did not try to prevent his being sent? Zanny stayed with her family on Whaler’s. They were very kind to her. Kinder than you were to your son, though they at first were not happy about the marriage which they feared could bring her unhappiness. Not that they distrusted Christopher. They took the trouble to find out what kind of boy he was.

‘ In those months Zanny, growing big with your son’s child, was lovelier than she had ever been. When the news of his death came it was like a flower cut off—Kristina was born prematurely. It was the shock, they said; and though there was no reason why a strong healthy girl like Zanny should die, she died. It is old fashioned to talk of broken hearts today. It would be better to say that Zanny’s heart went with Christopher.

‘ So the child was left. The Matron at the hospital cared for her for months—she loved Zanny—and by a miracle the fragile creature lived and grew to compensate a little for Zanny’s death, particularly to the Captain. He died last year.

‘ Now the family is threatened with eviction. A development syndicate wants to build a tourist hotel on Whaler’s which will be also a playground for officers from the camp.’

‘ That’s monstrous.’

‘ True. The mayor of Wallaba who is also an estate agent did not dare to do anything while the Captain was alive. He was a strong man even crippled, and no one would have dared evict him. He always insisted that originally Whaler’s was ceded to the whaling company on a perpetual lease. He had seventy years of possession besides, and no law would be prepared to question a white man’s rights to permissive occupancy of a place that he and his family have

looked after and improved. It seems he was over-sure of his rights.'

'Surely the ordinary rights of inheritance—?'

'That's the trouble. If he had been married to a white woman I'm sure there would have been no question even if it was only a *de facto* marriage. His marriage to Zanny's grandmother was no less a real marriage but it was not legalized. Therefore the syndicate is going to take over, and what can we do? I am an old man without influence. The Captain's daughter, Eva, is an old woman. Bert, her husband and Paul, her daughter's husband, are intelligent men but they are handicapped because they are Aboriginal. Perhaps you do not know that Aborigines count little in the eyes of the law. Besides, they have little knowledge of the outside world. The Captain spent his life trying to defend them from it.'

'And left them defenceless,' Hope's voice was bitter.

'We mustn't blame him for that,' the parson chided her. 'Give him credit for what he did. It wasn't easy for him in those days and he did it all for the best. Remember you're two generations later than him and so many things have happened in the last generation that old people like myself feel as though we've not merely grown old but have been thrown into another world. Like my friends on Whaler's I am trying to catch up with it by watching the television Jed bought a little while ago. Very interesting but it does not help us with our problem. Jed is not of the family but he has done much writing to Members of Parliament and civil rights organizations. Unfortunately he is handicapped in another way. It is Hope here who has been our tower of strength. Without her the family would have been out long ago.'

'What do you think I can do?'

'I am afraid that you have come too late to do anything.'

They evicted the women and children three days ago. We expected you earlier. Did you not realize when you got our letter there must be something urgent for us to break our long silence?'

'It wasn't my fault. You sent it to the T.V. station.'

'We didn't know your address,' Hope broke in. 'How could we? You're not in the phone book.'

'No, I—we—I—that is—I always had a silent number. I've been ill and in hospital and there was a mix-up about mail. I got straight out of bed to come.'

'I'm sorry.' Hope's apology was perfunctory. 'I thought it was just ... well ... that you couldn't be bothered.'

'I beg of you, don't make things worse than they are. I don't need your criticism nor the parson's to tell me where I failed. But don't let that get in the way of anything I can do now.'

Hope glanced at the cuckoo-clock and got up abruptly. 'Let's go, then. It's low tide at 4.30 and we can run right up to the house. We'll talk it over with the men. They are still there.' She looked at Tempe quizzically. 'I think perhaps you'll find them a little bit puritanical by your standards. That was how the Captain reared them. No liquor, no swearing, no gambling. And practical Christians in everything.'

Tempe refused to be drawn.

They went slowly along the sandy track fringing the beach where breakers curved and broke. A grey sea ran away to the nacreous sky with Whaler's lit by the last swathe of light from the low sun. The tawny rays gilded the white walls, and turned the grass of the canting hillside to an unearthly green. The last of the ebbing waters was receding from the narrow rocky neck that linked it to the land and as they drove along the rim of the Saucer she could see the tiny beach where the fishing-boat lay. She came to it as



something she had known for a long time, so faithfully had Christopher described it in his diary. When she stepped out of the car she had the feeling that she was on familiar ground.

She recognized as Jed the man who limped down the rocky path towards them, surprised to find that he was much younger than she had gathered from Christopher's entries.

'I'm glad you've come,' was all he said when the parson introduced him, and walked ahead up the path in rapid conversation with Hope. She heard his angry voice saying: 'A man came today with someone from the Council and said they were sending men tomorrow to move the heavy stuff and I said: "Over my dead body!" and they said: "That's a threat!"'

He led them into the kitchen in which the big old-fashioned stove glowed, and motioned Tempe to a chair.

'It's warmer here and I don't want to waste wood lighting the fire in the living room.'

The house was the house that Christopher had loved, with its waxed floor and scattered rugs, its solid furniture, its old-fashioned homely atmosphere.

Jed leaned beside the fireplace, rolling a cigarette with his left hand. Judging by the unscarred side of his face with its olive brown skin he must once have been strikingly handsome. Now he was like a tree that had been struck by lightning, the right side of his face puckered leather, his right eye covered by a shade, his right hand covered by a leather glove. The eye he turned on her was stern and calculating as though he was trying to sum up her usefulness to them.

'I don't know if there's anything she can do now. If

she'd come earlier we could have fought it beforehand,' he said harshly.

'She's been in hospital and our letter was delayed.'

'I'm sorry,' he said, perfunctorily.

He sat down in the big armchair beside the fire and Kristina climbed on to his lap.

Hope poured out mugs of foaming hop-beer.

The door opened and two men entered. Hope introduced the first of them: 'Bert Swanberg, Zanny's father.'

Looking up at the tall figure, height adding to his dignified bearing, thick, greying hair, eyes set deep under rough brows in a broad face, Tempe thought: This is the blood that darkened Kristina's skin. This is Zanny's blood—yet Christopher loved her. How could you love anyone so different? She was surprised that though she had never before been so close to anyone black she felt no revulsion.

Hope's voice broke into her thoughts: 'Paul Swanberg—he's married to May, Zanny's sister.'

Paul, shorter, stockier, more aggressive in movement, harsher in voice than Bert, was also lighter in colour.

They both greeted her politely, and though there was nothing for her to read in their faces she felt hostility flow out to her as from all the others. Would she ever break through the barrier they had erected? Yet Christopher had found them friendly and he had loved Zanny. At the thought of Christopher her eyes went to Kristina curled up in Jed's lap. For Christopher's sake she must try to understand. To live, she must earn his forgiveness even if he could never give it to her.

Paul asked: 'Is there anything in the local rag about the affair?'

The parson nodded and drew a crumpled paper from his pocket. 'Just a brief par about Larry assaulting a policeman. And, of course, indecent language.'

Paul laughed harshly.

'Larry doesn't swear and *he* says that all he did was to get between Eva and the police sergeant when he was trying to drag her out. The sergeant gave *him* a backhander which knocked him over.'

'Have you heard from him?'

'Indirectly. Tom Galvin says Sam's son drove him in his truck to Newcastle, but they warned him there the police were waiting for him at Hope's place so another bloke—a white man—gave him a lift to Sydney.'

'Where's he going?'

'Sam's sister lives somewhere in Sydney.'

Paul beat his fist on the table. 'The coppers'll be on to him there. They're always on to Abo boys in Sydney even when they're doing nothing.'

Bert nudged him, but Paul was not to be silenced.

'I can't help it if we got a lady visitor. If she's going to have anything to do with us she's got to know that this is no T.V. serial where everything comes right in the end for the goodies. It's not as easy as that for us Aborigines. It doesn't come right for us once we get into a jam no matter how good we are. Being Aboriginal is a crime itself in this country.'

Bert put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it hard, his voice soft and persuasive. 'I think you've said enough, Paul; the lady doesn't want to hear all our problems.'

Paul pulled away from him. 'If she's going to be any use to us she's got to hear them sooner or later and I think sooner's best. No good her thinking she's only got to lift a lilywhite hand for the magic to work. There isn't any magic for Aborigines and that's the truth.'

He reached for the demijohn of hop-beer and poured himself another mugful. 'The law says we've now got a right to drink in a pub, but what happened when I went

into a pub in Wallaba? The pub-keeper said to me: "Out of here, blackfeller." Another white tripped me as I was going out the door. Me that fought in the war.

'What rights have we got? None. They've taken our land from us. They've taken our names. I don't know the songs of my people, and I speak the white man's language.' He pointed a finger at Tempe. 'You've got an Aboriginal granddaughter—but did you know that the Constitution of the Commonwealth doesn't even mention Aborigines as people to be legislated for as people of any other race are legislated for in this country? Do you know we're not even counted in the census? Do you know I can only be counted a citizen now if I sign a paper to have nothing to do with my blood-brothers on the Reserve?'

Bert gave a low chuckle that shook his whole body. 'You may be my son-in-law, Paul,' he said, 'but you can most certainly go off the rails when you lose your temper. The lady'll think you've got a chip on your shoulder.'

'God almighty!' Paul exploded. 'Would any woman, black or white, be fool enough to think that a man needs a chip on his shoulder to set him talking when the police have dragged his wife and kids and his mother-in-law off the place that's been home to them and their father and grandfather for longer than most of those white scum have been in Wallaba, and whose son is on the run for doing what any decent boy would do when he saw them dragging them out? Don't let us try to fool the lady here who's come along though she despises us all just as much as all the other whites do. We've been wrong all along,' he thumped his closed fist again on the table. 'I always said the only way to get any security for ourselves was to start fighting for it. But you were frightened, Bert, and now look what's come on us.'

'I wouldn't do it, Paul; not because I was frightened but

because I thought the Captain knew better. I wasn't an educated man. I couldn't read and write until I married Eva. She taught me. When the Captain said keep ourselves to ourselves and bring our children up to be as good as the white man's children, I thought that was the best way. Let them grow up feeling safe and happy. Maybe I'm a weak man and Eva was a strong woman.' He made a hopeless gesture with his hands. 'It was easier for you and Jed. You'd been out in the world; but all I knew was the Aboriginal Reserve and Whaler's and what I read in the Captain's books.'

'I knew you were all wrong when I first came here,' Jed broke in. 'White people say you can't live in an ivory tower. You can't live in an ebony tower either. The Captain never saw that.'

Paul lifted his clenched hands. 'When I went into the army I soon found out that if you're going to get anything you got to fight for it. Up till then I was just another Abo boy earning a few bob at seasonal work, pea-picking, banana picking; kicked from place to place. Looking back on it, it's hard to remember that I accepted what the police and the other white people made me think of myself. "Out of town, blackfeller," when you were just walking along the footpath quiet and peaceful. "You can't eat here and you can't drink there—not even a lemonade." You can't go to school except on the Reserve and that only took you to third class and you forgot it as soon as you left. You can't go to the pictures. "Out of here you dirty, black b——"'

He turned his eyes on Tempe. 'I won't repeat the words they used to us. I kept my own tongue clean once I came here though I learned a lot of words in the army that are better than plain English to tell you what I went through.

'I ran into Lars when I was tramping through here and he said, "Come and join up with me." I went—not that I

thought I had anything to fight for, but I couldn't get a job. In the army I found it was like going from a dry paddock to a green one. All the things I'd been starved for out of uniform I got in uniform. I drilled with the white men and I bathed with the white men and I camped with the white men and when I went away from the camp with the white men I drank in the pubs with them and no one refused me. Of course it wasn't all as easy as that. There were some of them that called me a black b—— and some of them that pushed me around in one way or another. I took it for granted until a shearer in our company—we called him Ringer because he was a champion—said to me one day: "What do you put up with it for? The only way to make 'em respect you is to give it back." I'd never given anything back to anybody and I didn't know how to use my fists for anything but working. So he taught me, and the next time a fellow said to me, "You black b——" I lobbed him one in the jaw. Of course I got a few hidings, but once they learned they couldn't do it without getting a sock in the jaw they stopped doing it, and I learned then that they'll only respect you if you come back at them. I don't know whether I was a better man or a worse man for learning it or for doing it. I only know that the first time I knocked a white fellow down I felt at least I was a man.'

'Perhaps we live too well and too safe here,' Bert said

'We *lived*,' Jed broke in. 'But not any more. We don't live well or safe here now and if we don't fight we won't live here at all.'

They all sat silent gazing into their mugs when his harsh voice ceased. Tempe said nothing. What was there to say? And the others knew too well in their flesh and their nerves the truth of what he had said.

Hope threw off the spell of gloom he'd thrown on them. 'All right, what you all say is true. We know it's true. It's

been true in the past; it's true today; but we're not going to sit down under it any more. We don't have to. And now I think it's time for us to get down to discussing what's the best thing to do to get the family back here, and keep Larry out of the hands of the police. Let's hear now what Jed has to tell us about what happened today.'

'I went into town this morning and ran slap-bang into the police car just as I got there. The sergeant warned me against getting mixed up in things that don't concern me or they'd ship me out of Wallaba like any other cattle. Those were his words. Then he told me to get out of town before 11 o'clock or else—

'Afterwards I went to the Reserve to find out what was happening to the women. When I got there the superintendent said he wouldn't let any of us in. I didn't argue because I knew that anything I did would be taken out on Eva and—'

'My poor little wife. As though she hasn't suffered enough already," Paul groaned.

He got up and stamped around the room, his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets, the pulse in his temple beating fiercely below a purple scar.

'Did he say how Eva is?' Bert asked.

'I didn't ask him,' Jed replied. 'I knew I'd find out some other way and, sure enough, Georgina was waiting for me up the road as I came back. She'd cut through the bush. She says not to worry. Emma and George love having them. They're quite comfortable, and everybody's looking after them.'

'Sure they're looking after them,' Paul ground out. 'They're human beings, aren't they, even if they're black?'

'The superintendent's wife is looking after Eva's leg. She says there's nothing broken but it's badly bruised, and she's got to keep it up for a week.'

'Nice lot of room she has to put it up and rest in an overcrowded humpy,' Bert sighed, and put his gnarled hand over his eyes.

'Anyway if it's any consolation to you, two or three people in the town stopped me and said they thought it was a damned shame, and the matron from the hospital sent a message to say that if any of them needed medical treatment just to let her know.'

'Not all white people are wicked,' Bert said.

'Then why don't they stick together and help us to fight the ones that are?' Paul demanded.

In the heavy silence that followed, Hope whispered to Kristina to go and get undressed. She went unwillingly. When the door closed Hope said with an edge to her voice: 'Now let's get down to business.'

Jed walked over and looked down at Tempe: 'It must be pretty clear to you by now that there's nothing to be done unless we can get the whole dirty business shown up by the Press. Do you understand that we got you here to give you a chance to use your influence on the radio and with the newspapers, voluntarily, before we publicized the fact that Kristin's your grandchild.'

Tempe looked at him, puzzled. 'I don't exactly know what you mean.'

'We mean that if you refuse to help we'll spread it all over the country that Kristina is your granddaughter. We don't like doing this but we're desperate. We have a photo of you holding Kristy this morning. It'll look nice in the paper. "Tempe Caxton and her Aboriginal granddaughter."'

She stared incredulously round the hostile group.

'You really mean you were going to blackmail me into helping you by threatening to say I have a half-caste granddaughter?'



'Quarter-caste,' Hope corrected. 'We don't like having to threaten you but ...'

'It's funny that you should be thinking of blackmailing me for something that I'm not at all ashamed about.'

Hope shrugged. 'You'll understand if we find that difficult to believe.'

Tempe looked from one to the other. 'I can understand that,' she said slowly. 'Six years ago it was true. Even six months ago. Now—'

She broke off and found herself biting her lower lip in the way that Christopher used to bite his and Kristina bit hers in one of these strange tricks that the blood carries with it from generation to generation. 'I don't know what I can do. I don't know what you expect me to do; but at least, let us meet as people who want to do something without this terrible atmosphere of accusation. Do you believe me if I tell you I never knew that Christopher was married? If you want to wish on me any worse punishment than that ... I took it as only the passing infatuation of an eighteen-year-old boy. To be honest, when he died I didn't even think of Zanny. I don't know if I would have done anything if you'd written to me then. Now everything's different. I'm not going to explain why. It's not necessary. Now I feel that I have a responsibility towards my granddaughter. I know Kristina doesn't like me. It will be hard for her to love me. That doesn't make any difference. I'm going to fight for her as I should have fought for my son.'

The atmosphere cleared as though a fog had lifted.

Some of the warmth Christopher had known returned as Jed fried the fish that Paul had brought home, and Hope cut up pineapples and pawpaws from the plantation. Tempe was a stranger still, but no longer an enemy.

Bert came and sat beside her. 'If we've been unfriendly,

we apologize. But it's not easy for us. I loved Christopher as a son.'

He put out his large black hand and she placed hers in it, surprised that she did not recoil from the touch.

Paul thrust out a hand. 'I apologize, too. But we thought...'

'Let's forget it. It's not the past that matters. What are we going to do?'

Jed sat opposite her. 'We'll tell you our plan. We're claiming Whaler's in Kristy's name. She's the direct descendant of the Captain and the legitimate child of a legitimate granddaughter who was married to a white serviceman. So we're going to claim the place as her legitimate heritage, and the family with whom she's grown up will be her guardians. Till then it's most important for us to stay on Whaler's. If once they get us all off they'll start pulling down the house and we'll have nothing to come back to even if we win.'

When supper was over, Hope took her aside. 'Would you be afraid to stay here tonight?'

Tempe hesitated. 'Afraid? No, but why?'

'The parson and I must go. The sergeant has threatened to arrest us if he finds us trespassing. Kristy must stay here. We think that while you're here the police and the mayor won't try anything.'

'I'll stay.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Tempe lay awake in the bed that had been the Captain's, hearing the waves crash against the cliffs, seeing the white

caps race in the intermittent flashes of lightning. It was on such a night as this that Christopher and Zanny had conceived Kristy—the triumph of love against all the obstacles they had put in his way.

She wondered if the child was covered—Hope said she was a restless sleeper—and opening the door to the adjoining room and heard a muffled sobbing that was immediately stifled.

She lit the candle beside the bed. Kristy was looking up at her, the tears wet on her cheeks, her handkerchief pressed to her mouth. She drew the child to her and the pent-up sobs burst out.

Awareness of life's continuity shook her. Once Christopher had cried against her shoulder like this and now his daughter, but the blood they shared did not bring them any closer. She had never broken through to Christopher, and now she felt that the child clung to her only because there was no one else.

'What is it, my darling?' she murmured as the weeping subsided, and she heard the broken whisper: 'Toffee's gone away and I'm frightened.'

Tempe gathered her up and carried her into her room, the child lying stiff and unyielding in her arms.

She lay beside her long after she had gone to sleep, noticing with a twist of the heart that except for her colour she was Christopher over again. The bone was the same, the blood was the same and suddenly the colour did not repel her any more. She saw it as Christopher would have seen it. When she went to sleep at last she realized that she had begun a long road whose ending she did not know.

She woke to the chugging of an engine and looked out on to a stippled sea where the fishing boat moved black between the white foam breaking away from its bows and the white V of its wake. Still half lost in a dream that had

brought Christopher back strangely confused with his daughter, she lay in the growing light, with Kristy snuggled against her, lost in the uncomplicated joy of caring for a child. As the dream receded and consciousness bared fact from fancy, she knew that if she loved her it would give her a reason for living. But what would the price be?

When she woke again, Kristy was gone.

She looked out from the verandah window and saw the little pyjama-clad figure standing utterly still on the porch gazing up into the coral tree where a flock of parrots dipped their bills into spiky scarlet flowers. She ran down the steps with a plate of honey-soaked bread in her hands and the birds swept round her in a cloud of flashing wings, green and yellow, crimson and blue. Tempe heard the ripple of her laughter above their high-pitched chatter, saw her bright face ringed by the brilliant living halo as they perched on her head and arms and heard her own laugh mingle with the child's.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mist drove in from the sea and the clouds hung over the Hogsback as they drove towards the town. Between the two women still hovered an invisible barrier compounded of distrust and uncertainty. Tempe sought for some subject which could give them at least a semblance of communication.

'Are you a relation of the Whaler's family?' she asked tentatively.

'By marriage only. My sister was married to Lars Swanberg, who saved my husband's life in New Guinea—at the

price of his own. They were army mates and the two finest men I've ever known. It was Lars who first taught us that we should all stick together and fight for our rights. I never knew how bad things were for Aboriginal people till Flora married him and he used to tell us of the awful injustices they suffered. He joined the army because he thought a returned soldier would be listened to where an ordinary half-caste wasn't.'

'How did you come to be, er, different?'

'Because I have an unusual mixture of races in me. My mother was part Indian, which meant they couldn't kick her round as they did Aborigines. My father was a Fijian who was black-birded into the country at the beginning of the century—that means he was kidnapped by good Christian Australians, brought here in appalling conditions and sold for seven pounds ten virtually as a slave. Strangely enough, being a slave and not Aborigine, later on his children had rights that the ordinary Aboriginal child didn't have. He was fiercely proud—my mother too—so I grew up without any sense of being inferior to anyone. A good beginning. My sister and I, with my husband's unfailing help, have carried on his work. Do you know anything at all about the general situation today?'

'I'm afraid I don't.'

'If you really want to be any use to your granddaughter you'll have to start learning.'

'Why hasn't something been done?'

'Ignorance, largely. In spite of your son falling in love with an Aboriginal girl and wanting to marry her seven years ago I'm prepared to bet that you'd never met an Aborigine till you came here, and never wanted to.'

'That's true.'

'If it wasn't for Kristy would you care even now that your daughter-in-law's people are despised, kicked about,

kept outside the ordinary community, made to live in the worst places, given the worst jobs, till they've got no confidence at all in themselves? They get no real education. The older people on Whaler's are exceptional because the Captain and the parson taught them. Bert's one of the few full-bloods I know who can read and write.'

'What about Jed?'

'He had the rare good fortune to go to the Kinchella school-hostel near Kempsey. Then he went to Technical High at Newcastle and was working in the steelworks until the accident rendered him unfit for any other job. Worst of all, it's left him sensitive about his appearance, and although he's young I doubt if he'll ever make a whole life. It's harder for him to put up with the things than the other men because he's known the freedom of an industrial town and of working on equal terms with whites who treated him on equal terms, because once you're in the union you're all the same colour.'

'Why did he distrust Christopher?'

'It wasn't distrust. He was protecting Zanny. You didn't guess he was in love with Zanny?'

'No.'

'I thought you might have guessed, though I don't think Christopher guessed either. Now Jed's poured out all his love on Kristy and she worships him. He's a fine fellow and a great battler. You'll get some idea of what we're up against by the time we've finished today's round.'

'What exactly do you want me to do?'

'Ask the mayor on what grounds the family have been evicted from Whaler's. I don't know what kind of welcome you'll get; it will certainly be a politer one than any of us would. He refused to listen to me when I raised the subject yesterday. Just shouted "Get out of here, you trouble-making black bitch", and roused on the girl for letting me

in. Now we leave it to you. Charm him; flatter him; threaten him if necessary. The only thing they're afraid of is publicity. They're like so many white people. All philanthropy for distant lands. You know: "Freedom from Hunger" in Africa and Asia; but, at home—"Let the adjectival Abos rot."

'You hate white people, don't you?'

Hope turned momentarily and looked at Tempe. 'My husband is white.'

After a brief pause she continued: 'My mother's greatest horror was that we should marry white men. When I was a child and saw white drunks lying in the gutter I'd sometimes say I was glad there was no white in me. But my mother—she was very religious—used to say: "That's not Christian, Hope. You don't want to think white people are naturally wickeder than coloured people just because it's easier for them to do bad things without getting into jail."

'I work with too many whites who are honest and decent and prepared to fight so that Aboriginal people can have the same rights as other Australians, to have any race prejudice. Only the bigot and the hypocrite want to perpetuate the myth of white superiority so they can go on exploiting someone else, Aborigine or Malayan or Papuan or Vietnamese or African or American Negro. It's all part of a pattern. Here we're only a tiny fragment of a world cancer.'

A chill ran through Tempe as she listened. This was dragging her into something she disliked and feared. She wanted to jump from the car and run away, back to her own world again—even stripped of its glamour it was a safe and comfortable world. The one into which this woman was trying to push her was one of conflict; forces met there whose existence she had never thought about and which she was afraid to think about now. Once get into that world and she would be caught up in a whirlwind.

Every turn of the wheels along the main street brought her closer. 'You're a fool,' she told herself. 'A sentimental fool. Why get mixed up with a group of Blacks you'd never seen sixteen hours ago? Once you step out of this car and confront the mayor you're a marked woman. They'll call you trouble-maker too and you can't afford it. You've got to find another job. Get out, get on the plane, leave the granddaughter who doesn't like you and get back into the world you know.'

'By the way I wouldn't say anything about Kristy being your granddaughter,' Hope cautioned her.

'Why not?'

'They'll despise you for it and that won't help anyone.' The car stopped.

'Here we are. The mayor's office. He's here at ten every morning.' Hope looked at her watch. 'We're just on time. Three minutes past. I checked it by the radio. How does it compare with yours? A minute difference. See what it is by theirs when you go in. You'll have to be out by eighteen minutes past. I can park here only for fifteen minutes. See the notice?'

'That's a funny idea in a little town like Wallaba.'

'It protects the mayor from over-enthusiastic visitors and also gives the constable an excuse to pick up anyone who isn't wise enough to check the time. They ring him when they get an unwelcome visitor. You may have some trouble getting in to see the big man. I just saw his secretary looking out of the window.'

'But this is fantastic.'

'To you it probably is. To us it's every-day behaviour.'

Tempe drew on her gloves slowly.

Seeing her hesitation, Hope asked: 'Are you sure you want to go in?'

She picked up her handbag, hating Hope for the twist to



her mouth, the flare of her nostrils, the glint in her eyes.

‘If you’d rather not go, we’ll understand. I should warn you they’ll stop at nothing.’

With an effort of will Tempe opened the car door. ‘Of course I’m going.’

She turned and said, with a matching irony in her voice: ‘Are you sure you want to wait? I’ll understand if you go.’

A faint admiration tempered Hope’s gaze. ‘I’ll wait.’

The two women stood measuring each other. Hope lifted her hand. ‘Good luck.’

\* \* \* \* \*

The typist in the outer office continued typing when Tempe stopped before her desk, her face mask-like under a fashionable haystack of blonde hair. There was studied insolence in her pretended unawareness as her long carmine fingernails clattered against the keys. She ripped out the letter and prepared to put another sheet in the machine.

Tempe put her hand over the bar. ‘Before you do that, my dear, would you please tell Mr Willmot I wish to see him.’

‘The girl paused and, without raising her eyes, said: ‘Mr Willmot is seeing no one.’

Tempe’s voice sharpened.

‘Then if everybody’s blind here, I suggest you tell him I want him to hear me.’

The girl looked up. Her startled eyes ran up and down Tempe as she asked: ‘Shall I repeat what I said?’

‘Mr Willmot is—er—busy,’ the girl faltered.

‘I don’t think he’ll be too busy to see me. Take my card

in, please, and tell him that Tempe Caxton, of 2X T.V. station, wishes to see him—now.'

The girl gasped and stood up quickly.

'Oh, Mrs Caxton, I'm sorry. We didn't know...'

She titupped across the linoleum, knocked and, without waiting for an answer, went in.

The clock on her desk was four minutes slow.

She returned smiling apologetically. 'Mr Willmot will be pleased to see you.'

The mayor came forward to greet Tempe, shook her hand effusively.

'Do please sit down, Mrs Caxton. I had no idea it was you, or I wouldn't have kept you waiting. Your name's well known to us here. My wife's a fan of yours. Without vanity, I think we might say that thanks to your sessions our home has become Wallaba's status symbol. Everybody's ambition is to keep up with the Willmots.'

He settled in his swivel-chair at a desk too big for the small room, rested his forearms on the unspotted rose-coloured blotter and, clasping his hands, fixed on her blue eyes beaming with professional candour. He might have been the man for whom the term 'status symbol' was invented, with his crew-cropped dark head, the narrow lapels of his single-breasted suit, the exaggeratedly pointed toes of his expensive shoes.

'You must excuse us our shabby little dump I'm building a block of home units overlooking the beach; my business office and the Council's offices will be on the first floor so we can have Wallaba's best view while we attend to the community's business. Now please tell me just what I can do for such a charming lady.'

She recognized his approach as the best how-to-win-friends-and-influence-people line. 'We're both in the selling racket,' she told herself, and said aloud with a smile:

'I do appreciate your kindness, Mr Willmot. I've come to you because everybody tells me you're the most influential man in Wallaba, and I want to talk to you about something which has assumed public importance.'

She paused, waiting to see if he would commit himself. Did he know what she was after or didn't he?

He nodded gravely and leaned a little farther forward as though he was making a gift of himself as well as of his attention.

'As a matter of fact I'm deeply interested in this question of the eviction of the Swanberg family from Whaler's.'

She saw the tightening at the corner of his mouth, though he was practised enough to keep the smile in place.

'The Swanbergs,' he said. 'Oh—you mean, of course, those Blacks. Is Swanberg really their name or just—'

'It was their grandfather's and their father's name, and therefore I think by accepted legal practice, their name.'

'I'm sorry to disagree, Mrs Caxton, much as I admire you. As far as I know there isn't actually anybody on Whaler's who has a right to the name of Swanberg.' He drew a list from the drawer and examined it closely. 'The older woman is known as Eva Swanberg, though I see here her parents were never actually married. She married a full-blooded Aborigine known as Bert something or other. None of these blackfellers actually have any legal claim to their names. He took the name c. Swanberg when they were married. Their daughter, May, married a man who called himself Paul Bailey who took the name of Swanberg too. He has a reputation of being a trouble-maker and personally I'd like to see him run out of the town altogether. His son, Lars, takes after him—a regular larrikin. At the moment he's in some trouble for attacking a policeman here. Unfortunately he escaped, but the police are looking for him. Altogether rather an unsavoury bunch.

Not something old Captain Swanberg would have been very proud of, though any white man who takes up with a gin asks for trouble. He was a foreigner, of course, and that explains much.'

Tempe clamped down her rising anger. 'You haven't yet explained why the family was evicted from Whaler's.'

'For the best reason in the world, my dear lady. Because they have no legal claim to Whaler's. A lease of it has been taken by a development syndicate which aims to turn it into a tourist centre, something that will bring much-needed trade to Wallaba. They wouldn't have been forced off if they'd gone quietly. They were given notice to quit months ago and they'd have been out long since if it hadn't been for outside interference. They had plenty of time to find somewhere around here on the Reserve where they could settle in with their own kind. I don't know what they're complaining about. The Reserve's on the river in a choice position that'll also be snapped up by development companies once Wallaba begins to go ahead.'

'But Whaler's has been the Swanberg's home for the best part of a century. I always thought permissive occupancy was accepted by the law.'

'Whatever rights there might have been died with the old man, and as he wasn't legally married, his half caste bastards—forgive me for the word—have no claim whatever. As for the others, no one even knows who fathered the youngest illegitimate brat.'

'Wasn't her father's name on the registration certificate?'

He gave an amused patronizing laugh. 'Now, now, Mrs Caxton, don't tell me a sophisticated woman like you is so innocent of the facts of life. These gins will sleep with any of the white trash around here for a bottle of beer.'

He leaned his head to one side and dropped his voice

confidentially: 'As a woman of the world you'll see that this is a pretty dirty business altogether, and my advice to you as one of your admirers is to get out of it—quick. I'm glad you came to me so that I could tell you frankly that there'll be a lot of mud flying, and some of the mud will stick. And you don't want that in your profession, do you?'

He was trying to frighten her off, and if he was trying to frighten her off, he was afraid. She leaned towards him with the same confidential air.

'It's very kind of you to be so concerned for me, Mr Willmot but, you know, I'm not afraid of mud. I've always found in my life that eventually some sticks in the right place, and in this case I think you will find that public opinion will be on the side of the people of Whaler's rather than on that of the real estate dealers who at the moment haven't the highest reputation amongst financial journalists and radio commentators'

He drew back sharply and straightened himself in his chair, a frown wiping the persuasive smile from his face. 'I hope you don't mean to reflect on anyone concerned in this affair.'

'I'm not qualified to do so. I leave that to the various experts. That's why I think it's a matter for the Lands Department, and – and public opinion generally. I have great faith in public opinion.'

'I can assure you that the public opinion that counts round here will be solidly against you, and police evidence won't give your friends on Whaler's too good a reputation.'

'And I can assure you that in Sydney at the moment police evidence in a number of cases has been under scrutiny. If this matter of Whaler's gets into the news...'

His mouth set in an ugly scowl. 'You'll find it hard to get this into the news. There are a lot of influential people—not only in Wallaba—who are anxious to see that beauty

spots like Whaler's aren't monopolized by Abos. If you start a fight about this, Mrs Caxton, I warn you you'll run up against a lot of opposition, and that might include some of the people on whom you depend for a living and you wouldn't like that, would you? '

She sickened as though she had touched something filthy.

For the first time in her life she was aware of evil as a part of ordinary, everyday living. Something she had never felt before crystallized in her—contempt and anger, and resolution. To hide it she laughed the bubbling clear laugh that was part of her stock-in-trade, throwing back her head and showing the lines of throat and chin. 'You really do sound very melodramatic, Mr Mayor.'

The mayor fixed her with his bold blue eyes, calculating her strength and her weakness. 'I warn you that the people who want Whaler's are prepared to fight.'

She rose, hoping her years of training endowed her to express in full an overwhelming confidence she did not feel in her heart.

'They'll be amazed at the strength of the opposition.'

The mayor came to his feet.

'Well, I can tell you that by the time the case comes to court, the Whaler's mob will be well and truly off and we'll be well and truly on.'

Despite the strength of the words, Tempe hoped she detected a lessening of confidence in his expression.

She was still smiling as she walked out.

The car was waiting. Hope had her eyes on the police constable who stood leaning on the lowered window of the driver's seat.

As Tempe came up he made a gesture towards the notice on the edge of the footpath. 'Can't you read? '

'I have been here exactly thirteen minutes thirty-two seconds,' Hope replied calmly.

‘You’ll need a witness for that.’

He opened his plump black notebook.

‘What’s your name?’

‘You evidently have a very short memory, constable, considering this is the third time you’ve booked me in two weeks.’

He looked at her with one eyebrow raised.

‘If I was expected to remember the name of every gin round here, I’d have a headache. Come on, what’s your name?’

‘Excuse me, constable,’ Tempe interrupted, ‘I think there must be some mistake. I can confirm the fact that we got here at three minutes past ten and it’s now seventeen past, so it’s quite impossible for the car to have been parked longer than fifteen minutes.’

The constable levered himself up from the car door and looked down at her, his pencil, poised above the notebook. ‘Let me tell you I have a witness that you went into that office at five minutes to ten.’

‘And I can assure you that the mayor’s clock is four minutes slow. Shall we go in and check?’

He stood rocking to and fro uncertainly. ‘So you’re prepared to give evidence, are you? You’d both better come along with me to the police station.’

‘Why?’ Tempe inquired, recalling what she had heard Keith say about police investigations.

‘You’ll find out when you get there.’

‘Then you are preferring a charge against us?’

‘I don’t say anything about preferring a charge.’

‘Surely you can’t ask us to go to the station without preferring a charge?’

He looked at her carefully, obviously weighing things up, slowly closed his book and put it in his breast pocket, replacing the pencil with excessive carefulness.

‘As you’re a stranger in the town and this woman is driving for you, I’ll let the matter pass today, but let it be a warning to you.’

‘A warning about what, constable?’

He ignored the query and turned to Hope. ‘And don’t you go near the Reserve. Do you hear?’

‘But I have clothes and blankets for the Swanbergs.’

Tempe’s voice was firm. ‘We’ve been told that her aunt needs medical attention and we want to see her.’

‘Well you can’t, see.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t.’

‘Then it’s time you learnt the law. The Aborigine’s Welfare Board gives the superintendent the power to stop undesirables going on to the Aboriginal Reserve and he says that she’s not to be allowed. Nobody from the mob on Whaler’s is to be allowed.’

‘You don’t apply such a prohibition to me, I presume?’

He turned the question over in his mind. ‘Naturally, since we didn’t know you were here, we’ve got no prohibition against you.’

‘Then may I suggest you ring the superintendent and tell him that I would like to see the family from Whaler’s. My time’s precious and I don’t want to have to put a call into the editor of one of our biggest papers, who’s a friend of mine. You know the campaign they’re running at the present time against police and public servants who forget they are servants of the public.’

The constable hesitated, considered, started what appeared to be a protest, paused again, then said: ‘All right. But if that woman tries to put a foot into the Reserve I’ll have her arrested.’

He turned and went with his ponderous gait across the footpath and up the steps to the mayor’s office.

They drove off in silence.



Tempe laughed, a genuine laugh, compounded of amusement at the man's heavy-handed methods and the joy of finding that she wasn't afraid to fight.

Hope let out a long-drawn whistle as she turned the corner. 'You're wonderful. Frankly, I didn't think you had it in you.'

'Neither did I.'

She stopped the car on a quiet part of the road outside the town and handed Tempe a cigarette. 'I apologize for what I've thought about you. Tell me all about it, and then we'll plan the next move.'

She listened intently and said, when Tempe had finished: 'You realize you're right in it now?'

'Yes, up to the eyes.'

\* \* \* \* \*

The track to the Reserve turned off the main road south of the township and followed the winding bank of a small creek for about three miles. They drew up at a cyclone gate with a notice board: 'Riverside Reserve'.

From the gateway it was picturesque, with tall trees lining the roadway that led up to an attractive white house on a green hillock.

'Sorry! You'll have to walk in,' Hope said. 'Both the Super and his wife have me set. Remember he's God in there. And I can't risk any more trouble with the police. They really would make me leave town, though it's illegal. Then we'd be in a hole as I'm the only mobile one except Jed, and Jed oughtn't to leave Whaler's again or they'll pick him up on some trumped-up charge. Ask the super-

intendent to send the young ones out for the parcels, will you? ’

She tooted the horn.

An old Aborigine came hurrying down the track, outsize khaki trousers flapping on his bony frame. He kept calling, as he opened the gate :

‘ Please come in, Missus. Please come in. Boss just got up. He’s expecting you. You mind out on this track. Plenty rain and plenty mud. Boss and constable always drive up in car. ’

Tempe stepped carefully along the edge of the track where car wheels had gouged ruts between curling walls of mud, the old man trotting beside her. As her shoes sank in the mud he uttered incoherent, shocked cries, one arm outstretched as though he would like to help her but didn’t dare. Each time she caught his one eye in a face brown and wrinkled as the husk of a passion-fruit, he grinned shamefacedly as though he was responsible for the state of the track.

‘ Oh God! ’ she breathed. ‘ What do we make of people! ’ This poor obsequious creature might be Bert or Paul’s brother—Bert with his quiet dignity, Paul with his fierce pride.

He trotted forward to open the gate that led to the superintendent’s garden, hurried ahead of her along the gravel path and up the steps of the verandah calling: ‘ Boss, boss! Missus is here. ’

A roar came from within: ‘ Didn’t I tell you to let me know as soon as the car arrived? ’ The superintendent appeared in the doorway, buckling his belt. When he saw Tempe anger was wiped off his face and replaced by an official smile of welcome. He ran down the steps, a big, impressive figure in khaki slacks and jacket ironed to glossiness.

‘Well, well, well, Mrs Caxton, this is indeed a pleasure; but I must apologize for you having to walk up this terrible track. The constable rang to say you were coming to see me and I told my gardener here to go down and open the gate when your car came and of course I expected you to be driven right up to here.’

‘The constable said my friend couldn’t come in, so we naturally took it that she couldn’t bring the car in either.’

‘A mistake: I assure you there was nothing like that in my mind or in the constable’s. Whatever we think of your driver, as a matter of ordinary courtesy to a lady like yourself we would have allowed her to bring you in. Dear me, I’m afraid your shoes are pretty muddy. One-eye, go round to the kitchen and get a cloth and brush and clean ’em for the lady.’

‘Don’t worry. They’ll no doubt get worse as I walk round the Reserve.’

Tempe tried to keep the edge out of her voice since she did not want to antagonize him, but she need not have worried. He was too flustered at being caught unprepared to notice any tone of voice.

‘You must excuse me for not being out to welcome you, Mrs Caxton. I’m an early riser, and at this time of the month I’m, er, very busy with the, er, accounts, etc. Please come in, won’t you. My wife will be here to meet you in a minute. She’s been down at the laundry trying to knock some elementary ideas of cleanliness into the women.’

He led the way into a comfortably furnished lounge.

His wife hurried in, a spare woman neat in a blue uniform, obviously as nervous as her husband

‘Oh dear! Such a pity we did n’t have longer time or we’d have had a special welcome for you, Mrs Caxton. Such an honour to have you come here. Please do make yourself at home. If you don’t mind my saying so, you’re even

prettier off the T.V. than on it. I always watch your session. Just because I'm matron on an Aboriginal Reserve doesn't mean that I'm not interested in the finer things of life.'

She gave an uncertain laugh, patted the greying strands of her hair, and sat smiling at Tempe with eyes in which suspicion and fear alternated.

The superintendent went to a cabinet in the corner of the room. 'You must have a drink with us, Mrs Caxton, to celebrate your visit.' He took a key-ring from his pocket and, selecting a key, opened the door. 'Got to keep this locked up. Can't trust these Blacks, particularly with liquor; they'd steal the eye out of a needle. Now, what will you have? Never let it be said we failed in hospitality.'

'Nothing, thank you. I never take alcohol in the mornings.'

'Oh!' He gazed at her as though to find out whether there was a barb in her refusal. Deciding there was not, he gave a jolly laugh, saying: 'Then what about a cold fruit drink? My wife's taste runs that way, so we've always got something in the fridge.'

He closed the cupboard with lingering reluctance.

The matron went to the door and called: 'Betty! Bring in some bottles of lemonade and put them on the best tray.'

Betty came flopping in rubber thongs, her head bent shyly so that her black hair hid her face, a washed-out cotton frock hanging limply round bare thin calves. The bottles clicked on the silver tray as she put it down with shaking hands and stood back, peeping through her tumbled hair.

'Here, take my key and bring in some biscuits from the round tin in the corner cupboard,' the matron said.

While Tempe sipped her lemonade and refused the biscuits the superintendent toyed with his glass.

‘Well, now, I expect you haven’t just come to drink lemonade with us, Mrs Caxton,’ he said, ‘so if you like just to sit here comfortably, I’ll tell you all you want to know about the Reserve. I’ve been three years here and we’ve done a lot for it in that time.’

‘I think the constable misled you, Mr Superintendent I’ve come here on a purely personal visit to see the people the police brought here from Whaler’s.’

‘Oh, them! I don’t know if you’ve got anything to learn from them. Nasty, sullen lot, if you ask my opinion. I haven’t been able to get a civil word out of them since they arrived. Not a word of gratitude to me for allowing them on to the Reserve.’

‘Isn’t it asking rather too much to expect anyone to show gratitude for being evicted from the home where they have been born and lived all their lives?’

‘That’s not my business, and from my personal knowledge of the police and the mayor here, I say they know what they’re doing and what they’ve done is for the best of everyone concerned. I only came into the business when people come inside my gate. Then they’re my responsibility and their behaviour’s my responsibility. And I’m not too pleased, I can tell you, at having this crowd pushed on me. They’ve got ideas and there’s no place on my Reserve for anyone with ideas.’

‘I’ve always been led to believe that ideas anywhere were something to be encouraged.’

‘That’s not something we’ll argue about. I hear a lot of nonsense talked nowadays, particularly in the cities, about Blacks, and generally by people who haven’t got to live with them. But I can tell you, Mrs Caxton, that the Government does more for them than they deserve.’

‘From what I’ve heard these people didn’t want anyone to do anything for them except to leave them alone. How-

ever, all I want now is to be allowed to see them. Can you arrange that? We've brought extra clothes and blankets for them.'

The superintendent and the matron exchanged glances. 'Of course,' he said. 'Of course. That's what I intended just as soon as you'd finished your drink. If you're ready now the wife and I will go along with you.'

From the verandah the superintendent shouted: 'Hey, One-eye, run down to the gate and tell that woman to drive in.' He explained to Tempe: 'Too far to walk. Ordinarily I'd have taken you in my car, but the battery's flat and I sent two boys into town to the garage with it to get it re-charged, but they're not back yet. Take their time, they do. Lazy, bone-lazy, all of them.'

They went down the white gravelled path between well-kept lawns where a square of close-cut hedge closed in brilliant flowerbeds.

'What d'you think of my garden?' the superintendent asked proudly.

'Very nice.'

'Not bad when you think that all the water for it has to be carried from the creek.'

When Hope drove up, he and his wife got into the back of the car as into a taxi.

'Take us to the Settlement,' he ordered, and Hope went slowly along the muddy track lined by tall trees to where a row of unpainted weatherboard huts, differing from each other only in their dilapidation, stretched along the creek.

The superintendent leaned over Tempe's shoulder. 'This is the Settlement. Nice little place, isn't it? Note that the Aborigines' Protection Board has been generous here. They decided to improve the Reserve, so they built all those new—er—outhouses—you'll forgive me for mentioning such vulgar things. Before, everybody had to use a

common er—er—r. Now each house has its own. Smart as paint, aren't they? Brightens the place up.'

A hysterical giggle rose in Tempe's throat and Hope's lips twitched at the contrast of each drab humpey with its little wooden outhouse behind it painted in vivid colour—scarlet, yellow, blue, green, purple and orange, like monstrous fungus growths in the lush grass.

Children ran across the few unfenced gardens and chickens scratched in the sodden earth.

Dark eyes peeped round doors and through windows as they went along. Here were the repulsive creatures in bedraggled clothes and broken shoes Tempe had first seen on the road to Wallaba six years before. Women and girls peering from beneath untidy mops of hair; sickly babies in their arms, ragged toddlers clutching at their skirts, glancing timidly like wild things from eyes clogged with matter to which the flies clung.

'Take the opinion of one who knows, Mrs Caxton,' the superintendent said, 'Blacks are a lot of no-hopers.'

'Please do tell me why you say Blacks when they range from chocolate to practically white? The features of some are close to ours.'

'Anybody with any Aboriginal blood in them is called a Black. Officially, of course, they're Aborigines. Abos, as we say. If you look, you'll see they've all got Abos' eyes.'

Dark eyes, big and beautiful, like Kristy's. Tempe shivered at the thought of Kristy growing up here. She contrasted the house in which she had slept last night with this depressing slum-camp. Who was to blame?

'Could you ask for a nicer lot of homes?' the superintendent demanded. 'Look at that! Thirty nice little houses. And what are they like inside? Dumps! A few butter-boxes and packing-cases, and they sleep on the floor.'

‘How many people are here?’

‘Over a hundred and eighty. With the mob from Whaler’s nearer a hundred and ninety.’

One hundred and ninety in thirty two-roomed houses! She pushed back the indignation mounting in her as though it was a physical thing. Thirty dilapidated houses overcrowded with old people, middle-aged people, young people and children.

‘They’re a primitive lot,’ the superintendent went on. ‘I don’t know what’s to be done with them. Some of them have been brought in here from Blacks’ camps and they still live as though they’re in Blacks’ camps. Can’t get ’em to use the toilet, even, some of them. Frightened of the pits. Strangers come here with Lord only knows what blown-up ideas and then refuse to see the fact that the Blacks themselves are responsible for the conditions. The doctor and the hospital matron in town have got a lot of nonsensical ideas. All the nonsensical ideas come from the people who don’t have to live with them. An interfering old parson in the town even sent a letter to a Sydney paper.’

‘What happened?’

‘Nothing. The Board wrote to me, and I gave them the facts. Never heard another word about it.’

‘They don’t want to help themselves,’ the matron said in her tired voice. ‘The mothers don’t care. When the children get sick they just bring them to me. There’s so much sickness here I never get a moment’s peace.’

‘What’s the reason for that?’

‘They won’t take the trouble to feed the children properly.’

‘They all waste their Unemployed Relief and Child Endowment on two-up or liquor,’ the superintendent broke in. ‘Would you believe it? Some of these men pay ten shillings for bottles of sly-grog. Terrible stuff.’



‘Why? Can’t they buy it from the hotel at the ordinary price?’

‘Not in Wallaba. The pub-keepers in Wallaba have a sense of their civic duty. Terrible thing this new law they’ve passed, allowing them to drink in hotels. Ruin them entirely.’

A crowd blocked the road outside a ramshackle building from which rose the sound of voices in loud dispute. The superintendent frowned and hesitated, looking at his wife. ‘What’s wrong in the laundry?’

‘It’s that schoolteacher. He’s been making trouble again.’

The superintendent clucked angrily. ‘You don’t know what we’ve got to put up with, Mrs Caxton. As though we don’t have enough trouble with having to carry the water to the laundry, they’ve sent us a young schoolteacher with a lot of hifalutin ideas. He doesn’t know a thing about Blacks and he’s always interfering’

As though to a cue the schoolteacher came out, an angry frustrated expression on his young face. He called: ‘Just a minute, Mr Superintendent, I want to speak to you.’

‘I thought I asked you not to go near the laundry, Mr Manton. It’s nothing to do with your department.’

The teacher’s grey eyes blazed. ‘I thought I told you, Mr Superintendent, that anything that concerns the health of my pupils is my affair, and I’ll continue to make it so.’

‘This is no time to talk about it in front of a lady visitor. I’ll see you later in my office.’

The young man turned his eyes on Tempe. ‘I think it might be just the right time, if your lady visitor has a spark of common humanity in her. What would you say, madam, if the children you’re expected to teach had their lunches cut for them in a wash-house on a table littered with dirty clothes and with no attempt whatever at hygiene?’

The matron rushed in: 'That's a deliberate lie, Mr Manton. I told the girls who cut the lunches to wash their hands and always put a sheet of newspaper on the table. Much better that the children's lunches should be cut there than in the filthy, dirty houses by their filthy, dirty mothers.'

'Look at them!' the superintendent shouted, throwing out his arm. 'Look at them, Mrs Caxton, and see what stuff I've got to deal with. Can't even keep themselves or their kids clean.'

'I'd like to see you keep yourself clean in a tin basin in an open wash-house,' the schoolteacher retorted. 'They've got nowhere to wash, except here.'

'Whose fault is that—mine? And I don't have to listen to any criticism from you.'

'Nor do I,' the matron added. 'They're just a lot of dirty sluts; begging pardon, Mrs Caxton.'

'Then why don't you see that the mothers are taught something about hygiene? That, matron, is your department.'

'Well, I never!' The matron drew herself up indignantly: 'Didn't we arrange for two more barrels of water to be put here and a washing basin for the school when you made all that fuss?'

The teacher threw out his arms despairingly and turned to Tempe. 'It's a vicious circle. They confine them to dirty, unhygienic areas and then complain because they are not clean.'

'That's not your business,' the superintendent interrupted. 'Your business is to teach the children—or try to teach them, though that's a waste of time too, since they haven't got the brains of my fox terrier. Waste of time and money for the Government to give you a new school when a lot of other things are needed more. How much have any

of them learnt in the last year? That's what I'd like to know.'

The teacher again addressed Tempe. 'They make the education of the children difficult, almost impossible, then complain that they're ignorant.' He turned to the superintendent. 'They'd learn more if they didn't have to go home to overcrowded houses without any lighting. How are they to do homework?'

'You know as well as I do that if we put electric light in every humpey the old ones would stop them doing it. They don't want them to learn.'

'That's not true of them all. I had a good response when I tried to form a parents' association.'

'And I tell you I won't have you forming any parents' association here for the purpose of filling them with ideas. You know as well as I do these kids will never learn anything.'

'You know that's not true. I've been telling you for months that Shirley Carter is a first-class student. She'll be fit to take a class for the little ones next year.'

'Not on this Reserve, Mr Manton. I've got enough trouble with cheeky Abos as it is. You haven't been here a year yet and you have the impertinence to behave as though you know more about what's good for Aborigines than we do.'

'At least I came trained for my job, which is more than can be said of either of you.'

'You...' The superintendent restrained his rage with difficulty. 'Any more of this and I'll report you.'

'But not before I've reported the whole place'

The teacher turned to Tempe again and said in a biting tone: 'I hope, madam, that you'll go round with your eyes open. Not like a lot of other people who come here, whizz round in an alcoholic daze, then send in reports that'd

make anybody reading 'em think that this place was a model settlement.'

He went with long strides towards the school-house incongruously bright among the trees.

'I must apologize to you, Mrs Caxton,' the superintendent said, as they continued along the road. 'That's the kind of thing we've had to put up with ever since he came, and it's reaching the point where either the Department will have to remove him or I'll go. He's a born trouble-maker, that fellow.'

George's house lay on the edge of the bush that closed in the Reserve's only street, a two-roomed humpey like all the rest, distinguished from the others by two rooms of rough timber built on the back, the vine-covered verandah and the paling fence enclosing the garden. It was the one house that had the air of a home rather than a structure designed only to protect from the weather.

The superintendent stood with his hands on the gate. 'I've been trying to get the Aborigines' Board to let me move this and pull down the additions so that it'll be like all the others. It's bad to have this kind of discrimination here. Makes the other ones discontented.'

'Surely, if he built them himself...'

'The Board owns everything here, and we've got a perfect right to pull down the houses if we want to.'

'But this house at least looks as though they have some pride in it.'

'That's the trouble. Pride isn't a good thing in Aborigines. Makes 'em get above themselves, and they're hard to deal with. George has got all kinds of ideas above himself through fishing with the Whaler's mob. Puts up a fight about things, and that's bad for the others. Now he's siding with the schoolmaster. The Lord only knows what trouble the pair of them will hatch up. Anyway, the house is over-

crowded now and, if he's not careful, out he'll go, lock, stock and barrel.'

The superintendent opened the gate, booming so that the sound echoed among the trees: 'Emma, Emma, come out here. We want you.'

A woman came to the door. She resembled Paul, brooding eyes in a strong face, short, strong body. Neat and clean, with a hand-knitted cardigan over her cotton frock, she stood looking at them with one arm outstretched, leaning against the door jamb, in her stance something of both challenge and defence.

'Well, why don't you say something?' the superintendent demanded.

'What is there to say, Mr Superintendent?'

'There's a lady here wants to see the people from Whaler's.'

He stopped as though waiting for her permission to enter, but she said nothing.

'Well, aren't you going to ask us in?'

'You always come in without asking other times, why should I ask you in now?'

She turned her eyes on Tempe, and her lips moved in a faint smile. 'The lady is welcome to come into our house.'

She stood aside to let Tempe pass and, turning her back on the superintendent and matron, walked into the front room, calling: 'Eva, Christopher's mother has come to see you.'

The room was small and sparsely furnished and had obviously been the sitting-room; bedclothes were neatly folded on the old settee, and a stretcher bed had been erected near it.

Tempe went forward and took the hand of the heavy, powerful woman propped up against a pile of pillows, her throat constricting as their hands clasped. So this was

Zanny's mother, the Aunt Eva whom Christopher had loved. Emma pushed up a chair for her and she sat down, the superintendent and the matron standing by, irritated and impatient.

'Well, how do you like your new home?' the superintendent asked with false jocularly.

Eva, dominating even from her bed, raised her eyes to him. 'I don't like it at all, Mr Superintendent, and my relations here who've kindly given us shelter know that that's no reflection on them or their home.'

'You're going to be here for some time, so you'd better take a different attitude.'

'What attitude do you advise me to take, when I've been dragged out of my own home by the police and brought here like a criminal?'

'Come, come, Eva; that's no way to talk about the police.'

'I'll say what I think about the police, and as I'm not a member of the Reserve, would you please remember that my name is Mrs Swanberg.'

The superintendent's voice rose in a loud: 'If I have any more—'

Then he caught Tempe's eye, and stopped. 'Anyway, the matron's come here to have a look at your leg. How is it, this morning?'

'Worse.'

The matron drew back the bedclothes and unwrapped the bandage from the swollen knee. 'There, what did I tell you yesterday? The skin's not even broken. Just a bit of a bruise.'

Tempe came closer. 'If you'll excuse me, that's more than a bit of a bruise, with a swelling like that.'

'Blacks always go like that if they get a bump. She'll be all right. Just rest it up for a day or so, though don't

stay there too long. Being lazy never did anybody any good.'

'I was never lazy in my life.' Eva's voice came firm and cold. 'And my leg was never like this till the constable dragged me out of my house and pushed me so that I fell on my knee on the stone steps. There's something wrong with it I'm sure.'

'Nonsense! My wife's seen more of these things in a week than you have the whole of your life.'

'Are you a trained nurse?' Tempe asked.

The matron's sallow face flushed. 'I'm an experienced nurse.'

'Then you must be experienced enough to see there's something seriously wrong with this leg. She should have a doctor.'

The superintendent stamped to the door. 'Now look here, Mrs Caxton, I've behaved very well this morning, I consider, with you barging in here without warning, but I'm not going to have you tell me how to run the Reserve.'

'How you run the Reserve is not my business. The condition of Mrs Swanberg's leg is. May I suggest that when you go back to your house you ring up the constable and tell him to send a doctor out as soon as he can.'

The superintendent's face flushed, and his wife made some meaningless sounds.

'Mrs Caxton, it looks to me as though you've come here to make trouble, and the sooner you go the better.'

Tempe hesitated. Her heart was beating fast. If she went now the force of the anger the superintendent dare not vent on her would fall on Eva and Emma and the whole household. She had been rendered dispirited and despairing by the apathy and squalor of the people she'd seen. Now Emma embodied a spirit that had survived the de-

generating influence of her surroundings, and Eva had the pride and assurance of one who had never been subjected to it.

She felt her own courage grow firm. All morning she had gone from encounter to encounter, improvising as she met each obstacle and learning with each one. Now she saw them all in a long perspective: the mayor and the police and the superintendent and, beyond them, stretching upward like a ladder to the undefined heights of careless bureaucracy and uncaring authority. It was frightening in its facelessness. How did you fight it? Snippets of conversation she had heard in the flat when Keith and his fellow journalists discussed tactics in some public question dropped into place. 'Go to the top,' they said and, as though following spoken advice, she said to the superintendent: 'If this isn't done I shall go into town and ring the Chief Secretary, who is a friend of mine.'

She wondered exactly what she would do if he took her up on it and what the Chief Secretary would do. What would all the people from the Chief Secretary downwards do who let this kind of thing go on?

The superintendent was cowed by the mention of high authority. He stamped through the doorway and across the verandah, his wife after him. Emma followed them to the door and watched them go to the next house.

'You're a remarkable woman, Mrs Caxton,' Eva said, in her deep voice. 'Worthy to be Christopher's mother.'

'I hope I'll be a better grandmother to Kristy than I was mother to Christopher.'

Eva patted her hand. 'You're like Christopher. The same shaped face, same nose, same mouth, only he was fair where you're dark. He was a fine boy.'

'Yes. I didn't appreciate it.'

'I think you're a brave woman, if you want to be.'



'I don't know. I've never been called on to do anything that might be considered brave until today.'

'Most people come here and just stand while the superintendent puts all that smarmy talk over them. He gives them some drinks and they go away and that's the end of it. Nothing's ever done.'

'But how can they avoid seeing all those poor creatures out there?'

'He tells them what I'm sure he told you. The parents are dirty, the children are unhealthy and the mothers don't care.'

'Now you'd better see the kind of people Aborigines can be.' Emma said. She went to the door, and at her soft call Tempe heard footsteps along the linoleum. A slight, tall woman, the colour of milk chocolate, hesitated at the door.

'This is my daughter May,' Eva said. 'Perhaps you remember, she's Zanny's elder sister.'

Tempe took May's slender, seemingly fragile hand, remembering how Christopher had written of Zanny's.

May gave a warm shy smile that was quite unlike the glances of the women she had seen on the Reserve. She drew up beside her a boy of twelve, dark intelligent face with firm, full mouth. 'My son Peter.'

Tempe took his hand. 'I know.'

A twinkling small girl followed him. 'And I know her, too. This is Toffee.'

Toffee giggled, apparently finding the whole affair a picnic.

Eva continued: 'You said you came into this because you're going to fight for your granddaughter, but I've got more than that to fight for and let me once get on to this leg again and I'm going to fight even if they put me in jail for it.' Her black eyes were blazing and her mouth set firm. 'I've been too protected on Whaler's. My life's been easy.'

Now for the past three days I've been listening to the way the superintendent and the matron talk to Emma here and to George and even to me who's never been talked to like that in my life.

'Yesterday the superintendent slapped Peter's face. Nobody on Whaler's ever had a hand raised to them in all my father's life and my life and my grandchildren's life. I had to come here to have my grandson's face slapped in front of me because he didn't move fast enough to please a man who is supposed to be bringing up black people to understand civilized ways. Jed's right: the people on top of the tree will never be safe while those at the bottom are having the axe put into them.'

'When you go away from here are you going to tell what you've seen?' Emma asked.

'I'll tell everything I've learned,' Tempe promised. 'I didn't know until I came here that there was so much to tell. I thought this was merely a question of putting up a fight for you to go back to Whaler's. Now I see it's something else; something more fundamental.'

Emma replied in a low, passionate voice, her eyes burning in her dark face. 'Then tell them that it's not the Aborigines' fault that they're dirty and lazy and shiftless. What chance have they to be otherwise? If they ask you down there why the children are skinny and too lazy to do their lessons you tell them what the schoolmaster says: they don't get enough to eat. Some kiddies that could go to the school in Wallaba—because our teacher's a good man—don't go because the parents haven't got any food to give them for lunch, and you can't send them into that school without a proper lunch. They haven't got decent clothes for them. The men are away on seasonal work, pea-picking, fruit-picking. For the rest of the year they live on what they've earned; and by the time they've paid the rent

there's nothing over for frills. Only George has a steady job.

'The superintendent's wife—I won't call her a matron—will tell you that black women won't take the trouble to look after their babies. Doctor says the creek water is polluted, yet they have to wash in creek water, drink it and make the baby's bottles from it. The superintendent has the only tank apart from ours. George bought ours second-hand and put it up himself.

'Mrs Super'll tell you the women have no pride in themselves. Where do you get pride if you wear cast-offs and hand-downs and you starve yourself to feed your kids? Tell the people down there that on the Reserve we've got to buy our food at the shop at the superintendent's house and the prices are nearly twice as much as they are in the town. Why don't we go to town since it's only a three-mile walk? Because if we go to town we're treated like dirt and the shopkeepers order us out of their shops and the police run us off the street if we're there after ten o'clock in the morning. These are the facts.

'You see my home here and you see it at its worst; but look through it. My husband George and I have worked for everything we've got in it. I scrubbed kitchens and did washing for the white people at half they'd have paid a white woman. Everything in it we've bought. We added to it. Is it ours? What would you say if you lived here and the superintendent or the police or anybody else from the Aborigines' Welfare Board could walk through your house any old time without so much as "By your leave" or "May I come in?"

'It's not our welfare the Board's interested in. It protects the inefficient boozing superintendents like the ones we've had, and the whites in the town who exploit us by paying us less wages than they have to pay a white man. They're the

ones protected. We haven't got even protection from the mosquitoes and the hookworm and the dysentery that could be cleared up here in a year with a little proper hygiene. Does the Council care? No. According to them, all we need is a firm hand on us.

'If we stand up to them the superintendent will throw us off the Reserve. Once he does that there's no other Reserve on the coast will take us. They hound us from place to place. Last year they threw out a man and his family because he drank. He drank all right, but it was white men sold him the bad plonk and he wasn't drunk as often as the superintendent is. Don't think we want to spend the rest of our lives here. We'd have struck out for ourselves long ago, only George's old mother didn't want to go. She's dead now....'

'And now they'll move to Whaler's with us just as soon as we go back,' May spoke for the first time. 'Won't you, Auntie?'

Emma shook her head uncertainly. 'I hope so. I want a decent home for my children, too.'

'You think we ... will go back to Whaler's?' Eva asked in a tone in which hope and doubt mingled.

'You've got to go back to Whaler's,' Tempe declared, 'and we've got to fight together.'

Eva took her hands and held them between her two hard palms.

'You say we've got to fight. I was always against fighting. I always stood by my father when he said we must keep ourselves to ourselves and not get mixed up with the people on the Reserve. I always thought he was right; that if we behaved like decent, well brought-up white people, we'd be treated like them. But it's not true. I never wanted to listen to Jed or to Hope and I never wanted my children to listen to them. I know now they were right. What hap-

pened to us yesterday taught me more than all the days of my life. My father might have been right for his time but he wasn't right for ours. He was white and we're not and that's where he made a mistake. If you've got Aboriginal blood in you you've got no rights and it doesn't matter whether you live on Whaler's or on the Reserve. To the police and the mayor and the superintendent we're all the same.'

She pressed Tempe's hand warmly. 'Don't think we're saying this because we're anti-white. I'm half-white and there wasn't a better man than my father in the whole world. And Christopher was white and he loved my Zanny and she loved him. We're not against anyone for their race or their colour. We're only against injustice and this is unjust.' She paused. 'Now I want to talk to you by yourself. Emma, will you please tell the young ones to watch so there's no one snooping around to hear what I've got to say.'

Emma went to post them.

'Maybe you think that's like a T.V. serial, but it's necessary,' Eva explained. 'I don't like to say it, but there are people on this Reserve who would take what we say back to the superintendent. I don't blame them. They get a little extra something or other as reward. They're not bad people, but when you treat them like they're treated here you get the worst out of them not the best. You can buy white people the same, only the price is higher.'

She lowered her voice to a whisper: 'You don't know what it means that we can trust you. After what you've done today it won't make any difference if you think you can't do what I'm going to ask you. What you do here away from your home is one thing, but to do it in Sydney is different. Whether you do it or not I will always respect you and look on you as our friend in our darkest time. No,

don't say anything now. Wait till you hear. We got word this morning, Emma and me, don't ask how; I think Bert and Paul and Jed will know by now....'

She paused, searching Tempe's face and then whispered so low that the words were scarcely audible: 'Larry's hiding at the home of a man in Redfern who's a relation of Hope's younger sister's husband. I have the address here.' She showed a piece of paper. 'Just think, that boy got all the way with no money and the police after him and enough people helped him to dodge them! That makes you feel good, doesn't it? But it makes me feel bad that he is in Redfern with people he doesn't know and who don't know him. If they're good people he can bring trouble on them; and if they're not good people they can bring worse trouble on him. It's not easy for Aborigines to be good people all the time. Now I'm going to ask you just as one woman to another, so that you're not bound by any personal things: Will you go to Redfern and try to see Larry?'

Tempe felt that a chasm had opened before her. It was one thing to do something in a little country town with the solid backing of many people, but to go alone through the slums of Redfern which, for all her years in the city, she did not know, searching for an unknown boy wanted by the police: this was too much to ask.

Eva looked into her eyes. 'I don't ask you this because we are linked by Christopher and Zanny, though when you see Larry it will be like seeing Zanny as she was when Christopher married her. Whenever he comes in, my heart grows big and hot and I do not know whether I'm comforted or saddened, because I have Zanny always before me.'

Her forehead was wet with sweat and sweat beaded her upper lip. Her lips moved as though she was praying.

Tempe stretched out her hand for the piece of paper. 'Give me the address and I'll go as soon as I get back.'

Eva pressed her hand: 'Thank you, thank you—for us all. And for Zanny, too.'

\* \* \* \* \*

'It's an appalling situation,' Tempe said as they drove back along the road to Wallaba. 'What on earth are we to do about it?'

'You mean getting the family back on Whaler's?'

'No.' She paused in momentary thought. 'I'm astonished to find I'm not particularly worried about that. I mean about doing something to improve conditions on the Reserve.'

'That's much bigger, but we have to fight for it.'

'Is Riverside a particularly bad sample?'

Hope shrugged: 'Average. I'd say. Some are much worse.'

'Is that revolting man typical of superintendents?'

'Unfortunately he is. It's inevitable with the policy that's still back in the days of distributing "Government Charity". The men who go after the jobs are in the main the wrong people who want them for the wrong reasons. At one Reserve where we tried to get the Super to apply for new houses—they were infinitely worse than those you've seen at Riverside—he said to me: "I'm not sticking my head out and risking my job for a lot of black no-hopers who wouldn't know what a decent house is for."'

'But surely there must be some among them who have a—*a humane attitude?*'

'If they have, most of them hide it. I assure you that in all the Reserves in this State (and the others are even worse!)

not a quarter of the superintendents are men with what we consider the proper attitude: that is, with the aim of helping Aborigines prepare themselves to take their place in the white man's society.'

As she turned on to the road to Whaler's, the police car drew up beside them.

'Pull over!' the sergeant called.

Hope pulled off the tarmac.

'I've been waiting for you for a devil of a time.'

Hope said nothing.

'Was there really any need to wait, Sergeant?' Tempe enquired, 'since the constable knew that we were at Riverside?'

The sergeant swivelled his eyes to her. 'I wasn't speaking to you, madam. I have no quarrel with you and I suggest for your own good you keep out of this one. A lady with a public reputation like yours surely won't want to be involved in a case of running a doubtful character out of town.'

'What doubtful character?'

'You know very well—the woman beside you.'

'And what charge are you bringing against her?'

'Look, Mrs Caxton, you've come up from Sydney with a lot of fancy ideas about preferring charges and not being able to do this and that. We're not accustomed to that here. This woman's a trouble-maker. That's a reason enough for me to tell her to get out. I've got the responsibility of keeping order in this town.'

'I suggest you begin, then, by seeing that your own men don't break the law by injuring an innocent old woman being evicted without any reason or warrant.'

The sergeant drew in a deep breath. 'I'm not going to argue with you. I only suggest for your own good that it would be best if you went back to Sydney.'



'Are you running me out of town, too?'

'I'm just advising you. We're not accustomed to having Blacks talk back at us here and we don't want strangers coming to the place and thinking that they can do it for them.'

'Is there anything in the law against my doing so?'

The sergeant's neck swelled so that his collar made a red ridge around it. 'That's all I've got to say.' He shook a finger at Hope. 'And now I'm telling you if you're not out of town by sun-down tomorrow I'll have you run out.'

The police car shot off in a spurt of gravel.

'What are you going to do?' Tempe asked as they went slowly along the beach road.

'Go. I have no choice.'

'What about the Whaler's people?'

'They'll be all right for the time being. Your interference will make the police careful. I don't like leaving Kristy, but she'll have to stay. Not that the men can't look after her, but she'll be a handicap to them. I wish you were two people—a white woman on Whaler's would block them. Still, you've got something more important to do.'

'I wouldn't mind staying,' Tempe said hopefully.

'No. The best thing you can do is to get back to Sydney as quickly as possible and use all the influence you have to blow this business wide open.'

Now that she had no choice Tempe's mind began turning over, picking, choosing, arranging. 'Would you have my Aunt Lilian?'

'Your Aunt? The aunt Christopher loved so much? Aunt Lilian would be the answer to our prayer. But how get her here?'

'Let's go to the parson's and ring up. If it's humanly possible she'll come.'

There was the usual hold-up at the other end while Aunt

Lilian was tracked down to take the personal call. Her voice came at last, breathless and fearful.

'Oh, it's you, Tempe. I'm so relieved, I was afraid...'

She did not say what she was afraid of, but Tempe knew. The relapsed suicide would be in everybody's mind. The thought flashed through her with something like astonishment, so far away from her now was that poor, despairing creature.

'I'm quite all right. I'm at Wallaba. You remember Wallaba?'

'Oh yes, that's where Christopher...'

'Yes. Can you come up tomorrow by plane?'

'By plane?'

'Yes, or tonight by train?'

'I'd rather the plane. I've never been in a plane.'

'All right. Have you got enough money for the fare?'

'Oh yes. I've got a bit put aside.'

'Good. Pack a few things. We'd like you to stay here for some time.'

'I'll love that.'

'You'll be looking after Christopher's daughter.'

'Oh! How wonderful! What's she like?'

'You don't seem very surprised.'

'Well, I knew he was married, but I didn't know he had a child. I am excited.'

Tempe pushed the thought away from her that Christopher had told Aunt Lilian. She repeated the details and the directions. Aunt Lilian's voice came, girlishly excited: 'Good-bye for now. I'll be seeing you tomorrow.'

The pips sounded.

\* \* \* \* \*

Aunt Lilian stepped off the plane in a simmer of excitement, swept Kristy into her arms as though she was young Christopher, kissed her, and the child laughed and hugged her.

She took Hope's hand as though she was an old friend and chatted cheerfully to the parson. Her eyes were dancing as she looked from one to the other as they sat over tea in the airport café waiting for Tempe's plane to go. She listened and nodded, taking everything in as though she had lived through all this before. 'Just let them come to Whaler's while I'm there,' she said. 'I'll let them have a piece of my mind.'

She infected them all with her enthusiasm. When Tempe looked back on the four figures waving to her as the plane took off, it was difficult, in the aura of Aunt Lilian's optimism, to remember that the battle was still to be fought.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sydney came up in a giant scatter of lights stretching from Barrenjoey to Cronulla and westwards to the foothills of the Blue Mountains.

As they flew lower over the outer suburbs the scatter turned to a cluster of jewels, yellow and blue and red, with the Harbour lying like a pool of jet at its heart.

As she waited for a taxi the bustle of Sydney enveloped her, and Wallaba and Whaler's seemed on another planet.

She had slept in the plane and now felt that the spring that had been so tightly wound had relaxed. Overwhelming weariness urged her to go home, have a good night's

sleep, so that she would be in a better condition to take up the business of finding Larry tomorrow. Commonsense said: 'You've done all you can. Leave it to Hope. She's got friends everywhere who'll find Larry. You go home and get ready to see Keith tomorrow. That'll be hard enough.'

Eva's eyes haunted her. She knew she would never face them again unless she went, and that unless she went now she would never go.

She got into a taxi and gave the Redfern address. She thought that the taxi driver gave her an odd glance, but told herself it was only imagination. The thought that she was going to look for someone the police were after made her nervous. Until her trip to Wallaba her relations with the police had always been on the right side of the fence. 'Ridiculous,' she said to herself, 'nothing can happen to you in Sydney. Even if the police are after him you'll soon be able to explain everything.'

'I have no idea where Carline Street is,' she said, as the driver turned off into the narrow streets where old terraced houses opened right on to the pavement.

'Carline Street's the place where all the Abos live. Going to do a T.V. show with them, Mrs Caxton?'

'How do you know who I am?'

He switched on the light. 'Don't you remember me?'

'Why, yes of course. Les. No! Andy.'

'That's right. Andy Crowther. Used to drive you round when I was at the T.V. station. I didn't get a good look at you but I knew your voice.'

'I remember you well. You always whistled *The Wild Colonial Boy*.'

'I'm not so wild now. 27A, isn't it?'

'Yes. I don't know the district at all.'

'Don't worry, I know it. I grew up here, though I've

taken my wife and kids farther out now. Redfern's no place to bring up kids. They ought to evacuate it and blow up the whole overcrowded hundred-year-old slum.'

'You still sound pretty wild to me!'

'Got to be in this hard world.'

'As a matter of fact, I'm going to an Aboriginal family,' she said, feeling the necessity of explaining her visit. 'With a message from someone in the country. That's all I know about them.'

'You'll see lots of them about tonight. It's pay-night and you find them out on the streets. Nowhere else much to go. This hamburger shop's a favourite meeting place.'

She gazed curiously at the groups on the footpath laughing and talking together. This was something different from Whaler's or the Aboriginal Reserve. In clothes and behaviour these were ordinary city dwellers laughing and joking like any other boys in an industrial district.

'My father reckons most of them are all right if they're let alone.'

'What do you mean, "if they're let alone"?'

'If you're going to have much to do with your friends here, you'll learn. Here we are'

Tempe hesitated. The ill-lighted street had a blank wall along one side and a terrace of narrow-fronted houses opening on to the footpath, their upstairs balconies closed in with lattice and curtains, the doors gaily painted. She had never been in such a street before, nor gone into such a house. There was no light through the fanlight of 27A and the windows and balcony were dark.

Andy was watching her, his hands along the back of the seat. She fumbled in her purse. 'I'll pay you now and for standing time if you'll wait, Andy.'

'How long'll you be?'

'I don't know. Not very long, I hope.'

'People don't take taxis in these streets, so what do you say I come back in half an hour?'

She tipped him and he handed the tip back.

'I don't want that. I'll be back in half an hour.'

'Just wait till I knock and see if anyone's home.'

'O.K.'

She knocked and no one answered. She knocked a second and a third time. The door opened a fraction and in the light of the street lamp she saw a shadowy face.

'I've come from Hope,' she explained, with the curious feeling that she was involved in a conspiracy.

'What about?'

'A relative of hers.'

The man opened the door wider. 'Come in.'

She turned back to the taxi and nodded. Andy moved off.

She tiptoed after the man through the darkened front room where the street light diffused a faint glow through drawn blinds, showing two small figures in the single beds. Absurdly she sighed with relief when they stepped into the small living-room.

'Sit down, please. I'll call my wife.'

He went to the window that opened through into the kitchen and spoke in a low tone.

Tom Lidney was stocky, and on first sight might have been any one of the workers she had seen in Sicily or Greece. His wife came in, greying hair waving around an olive face seamed with wrinkles. She put out a hand. 'Welcome if you've come from Hope. Any friend of hers is welcome here. I'm Laura.' She seated herself on the other end of the lounge. Tom remained standing and, from his glances to the front and the back door, it was clear that he was listening for something.

'Did you lock the back door, Laura?'

'Of course. You see, we've got to be careful. The police have a habit of just walking through the houses of any Aborigines here for no reason at all. This is a quiet, peaceful house and we've never had any serious trouble in it—yet. . . .'

Tempe handed over the note that Hope had given her. He put on his glasses, read it, and then passed it to his wife. She read it and said, 'We both thank you for what you have done.'

'If they find the boy there'll be trouble,' Tom broke in. 'We don't mean trouble for us, though that's not nice, but we're used to it. Every Aborigine who's lived in Redfern for any time has had trouble of some kind with the police, though his conscience is as white as a shorn lamb. It's the boy we're frightened for. They beat up the boys here for nothing, the police do. Why, our Wally, a good boy as you'd find and a good worker with a steady job—those are his kids in there—was picked up only a few weeks ago when he was walking home with some of the football team. No fuss, no fighting, no drink, but the police swooped down on them and picked them up. Twenty-seven of them! Twenty-seven Aborigine boys coming home from football practice! A cop punched Wally in the jaw when he asked why they were picking him up, and they took him off to the station and accused him of offensive behaviour and insulting words. My boy that's never spoken any insulting words to anybody! So you see why we're frightened for the young fellow. He's upstairs with my boy and a couple of other lads that stay here. It all helps with the rent. Ten pounds a week isn't too easy to find.'

He went to the narrow staircase that led from the corner of the living-room and whistled softly. At an answering whistle he called: 'Wally, come down, both of you.'

When she saw Wally come slowly round the curve of the

stairs, Tempe's first thought was you wouldn't know he was an Aborigine at all, with his brownish hair and light-tanned skin. He moved with the easy gait of a sportsman and came across the room and shook hands with her. 'Thanks for coming,' he said. 'We're in a jam.'

Then Larry came. Tall for his sixteen years, thin and straight. Her heart caught as she remembered that this was what Zanny had been like: the colour of milk chocolate, Christopher had said, luxuriant dark hair curling across a broad forehead, a wide full mouth that curled at the corners, large lustrous eyes under level brows. She took his lean hand in hers, and when he smiled Zanny's smile she understood why Christopher had loved her.

Larry's face grew sober as he heard her account of what had happened at Whaler's. When she told him of her encounter with the police and the superintendent, he laughed with Zanny's gurgling laughter.

Laura brought in cups of tea and as they drank Tom asked: 'And now, what are we going to do? It's not safe for him here. You bet the Wallaba police will tip the police off everywhere there are Aborigine families they think he might be with. Now they've lost track of him in Newcastle they'll just as likely be here.'

Tempe had come with no definite plans, but suddenly her mind cleared. 'I think the best thing is for me to take him home with me. Nobody will guess where he is. Even if they did, the police wouldn't dare to break into my house without a warrant. Tomorrow I'll take him to my solicitor and to a newspaper office.'

A hammering on the front door shattered the complacency she was beginning to feel at being able to plan so well. The children woke and began to cry.

Laura rushed into the bedroom and switched on the light.



'My God, the police,' Tom whispered. The door rattled. Under the pressure of powerful shoulders the ancient lock gave. Heavy footsteps sounded on the linoleum.

Laura was shouting. 'What are you doing coming into my house like that, you white bodgies?' to the two powerful men in crew-neck sweaters and slacks.

Wally joined Tom at the narrow archway between the two rooms.

For a moment Tempe wondered if these were really white hooligans out to wreck a home against which they had some grudge. Impossible to imagine that these men were police.

As Wally and Tom pushed them back to the door one shouted: 'We're the police. We're the police.'

'Don't tell me that,' Wally retorted as he pushed him down the steps. 'Police don't behave like thugs.'

The other man followed him under Tom's last push.

They closed the door and leaned against it. Laura comforted the two small children. Tom pushed a bed across the front door.

Wally rushed into the sitting-room calling: 'Larry, Larry!' He went up the steep stairs. They heard him run from room to room, then down the stairs two at a time into the kitchen. 'The door's open. He must have run out the back way.'

A shriek exploded from the laneway behind the small yard.

'They've got him,' Tom cried.

They heard the sound of a struggle, a blow and a groan. Wally ran down the steps and put his hands on the paling fence, tensed to jump over it.

His father pulled at his sweater. 'Don't be a fool. They'll get you, too.'

Shaken, Tempe went back into the sitting-room and sat

down. The screams rang in her ears, the sound of blows, the groan. Laura sat on the bed across the front door clutching the two frightened children to her. Wally collapsed on a chair with his head in his hands.

'Get up, boy,' Tom said. 'There's only one thing for us to do and that's go to the police station. Get the five pound note for bail.'

He turned to Tempe. 'If you like you can wait here till we come back. That may be a long time, so if you prefer to go home I'll ring you when I've found out what's happened.'

Tempe got up. Her fear had gone and a surge of anger such as she had never before felt swept everything before it. 'I'll go with you.'

The taxi was coming slowly down the street as they stepped out on to the footpath.

'Where to now?' Andy asked, leaning over to open the door for her.

'Drive us all to the police station,' she said firmly.

'Trouble with the cops?'

'Not our fault,' Tom responded.

'You don't have to tell me that.'

The taxi slid rapidly through the quiet streets and stopped near the station.

Tempe opened her purse.

Andy waved it away. 'This is on me,' he said, and threw in his clutch.

'Thanks, mate,' Tom called after him.

A wave from the taxi window was the response.

'Don't let them think you're with us,' Tom warned her as they mounted the steps to the police station.

The sergeant looked up as Tom came up to the desk. His eyes went from Tom to Wally. 'Well, what do you fellers want?'

'We've come about a boy the police picked up in a lane behind our house.'

'What business have you two black bastards to come asking about that?'

'He was staying with us and I'm enquiring about his bail in the place of his father.'

'Bulsh. You just get out of here as fast as you can or I'll have you run in, too. Now scram!'

Tempe stepped up. 'Excuse me, officer.' The sergeant turned to her frowning.

'Well, madam, what can I do for you?'

'You can give me information about the boy these men were asking about.'

'Oh.' He examined her carefully. 'And may I ask what reason you have for enquiring about him?'

'I've just come from Wallaba where he lives and his parents have asked me to look after him.'

'Indeed. Have you any authority?'

'Must I have authority to pay the bail of a minor who's been arrested by the police when he was doing nothing? Here's my card.'

The sergeant picked it up and turned it over, read it, and laughed uncomfortably. 'Doing nothing! I prefer the opinion of the police about that. They say he resisted arrest and assaulted them. You'd better come around and see about this in the morning. There's no bail for offences like this.'

'Then I wish to see him now so that I shall know exactly what I have to tell my solicitor when I ring him up.'

'We don't like threats here.'

'It's the first time I've heard ringing a solicitor called a threat.'

The sergeant called to a policeman at another desk. He

got up and disappeared through an inner door. After a long delay two uniformed police brought Larry in, lolling between them, his eyes half closed, a smear of blood on his lips.

‘Stand up straight there!’ the sergeant snapped.

Larry made an effort to straighten himself but would have pitched forward if one of the policemen had not caught him.

‘Drunk, too,’ the sergeant snorted.

‘I saw this boy not half an hour ago and he was sober and healthy. Now look what those brutes have done to him.’

Tempe went to Larry and put her hand on his shoulder. His eyes focused on hers with difficulty as she wiped the blood from his mouth.

‘He assaulted a policeman,’ one of his guardians said mechanically.

‘Assaulted a policeman! If it was one of the two brutes who broke into the house they were both twice his size.’

‘Are you bringing any complaint against the police?’

‘I’ll bring my complaint against the police in good time when my solicitor has the matter in hand. Now I’m going to take this boy to a doctor. While you’re arranging things let him sit down. He’s not fit to be standing.’

One of the policemen pushed a chair forward and eased Larry on to it.

‘We can’t let him out. He’s on a criminal charge for assaulting the police in Wallaba as well.’

‘I know all about that. They’ll be happy to drop that soon!’

Before he could speak she said quickly: ‘Now, can I take the boy with me?’

The sergeant looked unhappy, and said persuasively:

‘Better leave him here tonight, madam, and let him sleep it off.’

‘He’s got nothing to sleep off except what your men have done to him.’

‘I don’t like the things you say, madam.’

‘Then we’re equal. I don’t like the things your men do. Will you let that boy come with me now, or shall I ring the newspaper with which I’m associated, my solicitor and a doctor, and if necessary have all of us spend the night here?’

The sergeant and two constables conferred over the second desk.

Tom drew her aside and whispered: ‘I wouldn’t take him home, if I was you, Mrs Caxton. Make them ring up for an ambulance from Prince Alfred Hospital—there are good doctors down there on night casualty and the boy’ll get proper attention. They won’t be afraid to give evidence of the state he’s in, and that’s important.’

At last the sergeant returned and sat down, his large fist holding a pen above the charge book.

‘I tell you, madam, this is very irregular and we don’t like doing it. It’s not customary to allow bail to criminals accused of assaulting the police. It’s dangerous. The bail will be twenty pounds on that account.’

‘I thought the usual bail was five in this district.’

‘That’s for obscene language or offensive behaviour. This is for double assault on the police *and* resisting arrest as well. I might tell you we don’t take cheques here.’

She opened her purse, grateful that she still had the extra money she had taken to Wallaba.

A shadow of disappointment passed over the sergeant’s face as she laid four five-pound notes on the desk.

‘And now will you be so good as to ring for an ambulance for him?’

The sergeant dialled unwillingly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tempe wakened next morning out of a dreamless sleep to find her mind working with a precision she did not recognize.

She rang the hospital. A sympathetic sister told her that Larry was under sedation. He had two broken ribs and slight concussion. Fortunately the X-ray showed no fracture of the skull. She rang her solicitor, who showed surprising enthusiasm. She sent a telegram to Tom telling him to see the solicitor.

She left the phone, heartened by the unexpected response, and began coolly to plan her approach to Keith. She was astonished at her own calmness. A week ago she could not have imagined herself demanding that Keith should meet her. She would have died rather than do it. Now all her personal emotions seemed to have been swept away by the things that had happened to her. It was as though her old life belonged to someone else.

It was curious to look back and remember the reluctance with which she had gone to see the mayor. Who was it said it's the first step that counts? Screw up your courage to do something that you fear and you banish fear. After her encounter with the police last night she would never be afraid again, not even of Keith.

## PART FOUR

TEMPF dialled so slowly that she got a wrong number the first time. She waited for a moment before she began again, trying to put her thoughts in order so that she should know exactly what to say and how she should say it.

She dialled again. The switch-girl put her through to the editor's room. His secretary answered with the impersonality of highly paid secretaries. 'I'm sorry, Mr Masters is engaged at the moment. Would you like me to ring you back?'

'Please tell him it's an urgent personal call.'

'Who's speaking, please?'

She tried to copy the girl's tone but her throat was tight. 'Tell him Mrs Caxton wishes to speak to him.'

She was prepared for the secretary to come back with the statement that he had just gone out. She was prepared for anything except his hard voice blurring in her ears: 'What the devil do you mean by ringing me here?'

'I must see you.'

'That's impossible. I have a conference at five.'

'Then I shall come round and wait outside your room till you're free.'

During the drawn-out pause she sat with the receiver pressed so hard to her ear that it hurt. A year and three months since they had seen each other and he spoke to her like that!

His voice came at last: 'Where are you?'

'In the Arcade.'

'Oh.'

The pause stretched out again. Then with brusqueness she had heard him use to other people but never to her he said: 'Wait for me in the Blue Wren teashop. I can spare you ten minutes.'

The phone clicked in her ear and she put down the receiver slowly.

The Blue Wren was the kind of home-made-scones-lace-doyleys-rest-your-feet place where elderly ladies from the outer suburbs came to relax on their day in town. At this hour the only occupants were two women examining their piled shopping bags.

She went to the farthest table, ordered a cup of coffee and took out her compact to examine herself, glad that she had spent two hours at the beauty parlour before coming.

She wore the topaz earrings that he said made her eyes look like those of a tigress at Taronga Park. It was a joke between them and she had a sudden swift memory of his lips on her lids and his voice murmuring: 'There must be something hidden in you that I've never found or you wouldn't have tiger's eyes.'

All that seemed very remote, like another life lived by another person. She wondered whether this was only her defence mechanism working and if her composure would crumble when he came.

Then he came. He paused outside the door and looked up and down the Arcade. When he sat down opposite to her she felt relieved that there was no familiar uprush of joy as when they had been together or of pain as when he had left her. Only astonishment that in fifteen months the keen edge seemed to have gone off his whole personality. It wasn't only that he had put on weight. It went deeper



than the thickened body and the looser contours of his face.

Without greeting her he brusquely ordered a coffee from the woman behind the counter, then said: 'This is damned inconvenient.'

She said nothing, thinking dispassionately how little extra flesh it needs to alter the whole impression of a person. He looked like a prosperous businessman.

Once he favoured casual clothes. Now he was in a perfectly tailored suit of the best cloth with the high-buttoned thin lapel and narrow tie that American fashion had made the uniform of most city men.

He looked at his watch, new, gold, elegant, a famous brand and expensive. He had always said he hated gold, but apparently an editor went in for gold, particularly when married to the proprietor's daughter.

He tasted the coffee and made a wry face. 'Poisonous. We should have gone to a pub.'

'It would take all your ten minutes getting there now.'

'Don't worry about that. Let's go.'

He paid the bill and went out slipping his hand under her elbow and walking close to her as though they had never parted.

He chose a pub close by frequented by racing people, and without asking ordered the usual dry sherry for her and, to her surprise, a whisky for himself.

She said: 'Sorry, I'm on the water-wagon;' and to the waiter: 'Bring me a bitter lemon, please.'

He made no comment but sat leaning back in his chair his eyes appraising her. 'You look well.'

'I am.'

He threw down the whisky in a single gulp, and opened his cigarette-case of chased gold whose antique patina re-

moved any ostentation from it. She saw the inscription inside the lid as he hesitated in the act of passing it to her, took out two cigarettes and lit them both from a gold lighter with his initials on it.

'I heard you'd been ill?' he said, and left the statement up in the air so that it was a query.

'Only a touch of rather bad 'flu. I'm quite all right again.'

'Well, the rest's done you good.' He gave her his familiar grin that went strangely with the wariness of his eyes.

She blew a smoke-ring trying to screw up her courage to say the words that she had been rehearsing and that now were running around in her mind like mice in a cage. She felt that she was sitting opposite a stranger. He was neither the man whom she had loved so long nor the man for whom she had yearned in her loneliness. But he was the man who could help her and she tried to see him only as a man whose help she must secure.

'This is ridiculous,' she said to herself. 'Get to the point; you haven't the time to fence like this.'

Suppressing every deep feeling, she consciously put all her charm and appeal into the eyes she knew he was now admiring with the topaz glints that the carrings gave them.

The words came out in a rush. 'I know how busy you are and it's awfully kind of you to have given me this time at a moment's notice. I can see the clock running round.' She glanced up at the minute-hand ticking round the large ornate electric clock.

He dismissed time and she knew he had lied about the conference.

'I want your help for some friends of mine.'

The wariness in his eyes sharpened, his wiry brows lowered, he became tense as a fencer watching his adversary's foil.

'If it's a question of some cash I could manage that.'

'I don't need money, thanks all the same. This is something else.'

'You'd better tell me '

She plunged into the story, her mind clearing with the words.

He listened without change of expression. As she spoke, images tumbled over in her mind like a background of silent film to a monologue. Christopher's face, Christopher and Zanny, Christopher and Kristina, alike and yet so unlike. Whaler's and the washing-blue of the sea. She forgot her conscious charm. She was begging for something not only for Christopher's child or Whaler's but for herself. If she could restore something in which Christopher had believed he would perhaps forgive her. She said nothing of that.

She used all her skill to build up for him a newsman's story—romantic, sensational, emphasizing the things he hated: the corruption of some of the huge development companies, the above-the-law attitude of the police. She finished and sat waiting for him to speak, hoping that the sudden warmth that had replaced the wariness in his eyes meant that she had touched him.

He sat half-smiling. Then: 'By God, I don't know what you've been doing to yourself, but you're more beautiful than ever.'

Her thoughts jarred to a stop. She had opened her mind to him, tried to make him meet her on a level on which they had never met before, and he had listened to her at the level at which he'd left her. Her mind split in two. Be honest. Why had she spent the hours at the beauty parlour, dressed to please his taste if not for such reaction as this? Use it then.

'I'm not really.' She gave him one of her slow smiles that

publicity agents used to call enigmatic, and was shocked that she could play a game she loathed. Tit-for-tat. 'If you look at me well you'll see that I'm very definitely not. It's only that you haven't seen me for a long time.'

'Too long.' His voice had roughened. 'Too damned long.'

'Don't let's talk about that now,' she said, with a lingering smile. 'I didn't ring you for compliments. I rang you to ask if you would help me.'

'Help you with what?'

'I'm sorry I didn't make that clear. I want to get Larry out of jail. I want to get the family back on to Whaler's. I know that's what Christopher would have wanted.'

'But how can I help?' His voice was irritable.

'They say there that if we could get publicity for what's happening it could be stopped.'

'You haven't got a chance. A bunch of Abos up against what the local mayor wants for army officers. You're wasting your time.'

'That might have been so ten, even five years ago, but not now. Everybody's very touchy about what's happening to Aborigines everywhere in Australia, and if you took this up...'

'What do you mean, if *I* took it up?'

'I mean ... if the *Globe* took up the case and gave it publicity we'd have a very good chance of winning.'

'It's not our policy.'

'Can't you do something about the policy?'

'I'm only there to edit the paper.'

'You always said that one of the reasons you wanted to be editor was so that you could influence policy.'

The second whisky had deepened the flush in his cheekbones and suddenly he leaned across the table and put his

hand over hers. 'Why do you have to torment me like this the first time we've met in months?'

She could not answer. At his touch fire swept through her destroying the barrier between them. For a moment pain stabbed her, then turned to joy.

He glanced at his watch. 'I'll have to get cracking. I've got only fourteen minutes before the conference.'

He pressed her hand again, and his voice thickened. 'I'll think it over and, if you like, I'll drop in on my way home tonight and let you know just what I can do.'

She stood up, dizzy with triumph. The pressure of his hand on her elbow as he helped her into the taxi lingered.

\* \* \* \* \*

She put her keys in the door and waited for a moment, afraid to turn it and yet afraid to linger outside. The grass had grown over Jasper's grave under the frangipani tree and only a bump in the grass showed where it had been. Now even the shame with which it always filled her gave way before the exultation that had floated her home. When she stepped inside she waited again for the old oppressive miasma to catch her by the throat. It had gone. She opened the door to the balcony and stood enchanted by the glory of the afterglow above Mosman headland where the windows gave back the sun. High above it mare's tails streamed in fiery splendour across a greenish sky and gilded the darkening waters of the bay. The yang-yang of the currawongs echoed plaintively from the trees along the cliffs. She breathed in the crisp air and felt it sweep the mist

from the corners of her mind as it had swept them from the flat.

She exulted that the old magic still worked. They had only to sit opposite each other in an ugly pub for it to work. Some fatality bound them together as if they had drunk Tristan and Isolde's love potion. Neither his marriage nor the birth of his children had altered that. What it would do in the future she didn't know nor did she care. There was only now.

As though in defiance of all the problems that lay ahead she went to the radiogram, put on the *Liebestod*, and as the music soared unbearably poignant she soared with it, unmindful that this was the requiem of love.

In six hours at the most he would come. Six hours! an eternity. How would she fill them? Then she saw that the flat looked unlived in, neglected, and she plunged into cleaning it. House-cleaning was something she had not done for a long time; it was Mrs Vaks work. Now she found a joy in it that she would not have believed possible a few hours before.

Maybe this was what was lacking in my broadcasts, she told herself. I was too caught up in the glamour. I didn't know there could be pleasure in doing the chores for your man's homecoming. I forgot that house-cleaning can be fun when it's part of home-making.

When the house had reached perfection she took out her notes and began to arrange them so she would have everything ready for the campaign that Keith would launch in the *Globe*. This was the kind of campaign that brought out the best in him. She knew the thoroughness with which he liked to document his articles, so she typed her scrawled notes carefully, one to each small sheet of copy-paper that had lain untouched in the bottom of the desk since he went. She saw his frowning brows bent over them, his pro-

truded lower lip, and imagined the slashing phrases he would use.

She glowed at the thought that this was something which she could share with him. No matter that no one would know about it, it would be enough that she shared it with him. Her mind was alive in a way she had never known.

And her body was alive again. Tonight would begin something new for them. He was not coming only for discussion. Some compromise was surely possible, in which they could have each other and he his ambition. Probably his wife wouldn't care so long as there was no open scandal, now that she had the children and all the trappings of marriage for which her father had bought him.

'I wouldn't want any of those things,' she told herself. 'I did without them for so long that I know they don't mean a thing. I wouldn't be a drag on him. I can keep myself, only let me have him as I had him before.'

She found she was praying as she hadn't prayed in many years, foolish, incoherent prayers addressed only vaguely to a god whom she really couldn't imagine approving of what she was planning to do.

She had brought a bottle of his favourite wine on the way home and she cooked the kind of supper he liked. Then she soaked for a long time in a bath perfumed with bath salts he said reminded him of peppermint gums in the rain. It left nothing behind it except a freshness that underlay the elusive seductiveness of the personal perfume blended for her by one of her sponsors. As she stood naked before the long bathroom mirror, dabbing her breasts and her underarms, she thought that his poor deformed wife would never dare stand naked before the bathroom mirror. She could even feel sorry for her now. How humiliating it must be for a woman to know that her father's money bought her husband for her and only that held him!

Over her finest underwear she put on a tailored house-coat of cream wool edged with wide black braid that emphasized the creaminess of her skin and the darkness of her hair. He had once laughed at her, saying he was sure her craze for tailored things was because she knew they emphasized her femininity. He hadn't said femininity—he'd said femaleness, a word she hated, but he said it was part of her genteel upbringing that made her dislike the facts of life.

Did she dislike the facts of life? She had denied it then and she denied it now. Wasn't what she was doing now, facing the facts of life?

She'd be no back-street woman. They had shared too much and loved too deeply for that. It wasn't the perfect romance, but maybe the perfect romance was possible only when you were young and didn't realize the price you were paying. What was the Spanish proverb Keith used to quote: 'Take what you want, said God. Take it, and pay for it.'

The moon was just coming up above the ridge of Mosman silhouetting the houses and the flats in a jagged black backdrop against the luminous cyclorama of the sky. It turned the naked branches of the jacaranda to an intricate wire sculpture and the bay below to a pool of shimmering light. This was how Keith liked it best, though he would never admit that it affected him.

'The pathetic fallacy is out of date,' he used to say. 'If my temper's filthy, it's filthy irrespective of whether there is a full moon; and if I'm cheerful I don't care if the sky falls.' Then he would pull her to him and say: 'The only effect Nature has on me is when I'm in bed with it.'

It wasn't true, of course, but he liked to see himself as impervious to the things that affected others.



She set a folding table with a shaded lamp by the lounge windows. This had been their habit all the years they'd been together. A slow supper in which she retailed what she had to tell and he went through the events of the day while tension relaxed till she would feel desire smoulder in him. 'And so to bed.'

She switched on the radio and the saccharine music of a late-night programme filled the room with its cloying melody. It was one of the things about which he always teased her. Whenever he came in that music would be playing and he would switch off the nob in the middle of it and say 'Slush again. You're an incorrigible romantic.'

Maybe she was. She stretched her arms above her head and danced to the music, slowly, voluptuously. Maybe she was really made for the days of great courtesans—the power behind the throne—and now that she had found the world she wanted to work for and fight for she could be the power behind his pen. That was romantic, too, but somehow you couldn't say the power behind his typewriter.

She did not hear the door open and he was half-way across the room before she knew he was there, his arms around her, his mouth hard against hers. She struggled for a moment to impose the pattern she had foreseen, but the racing of her own heart answered his. The moon and the music were blotted out by the storm of desire that swept them into oblivion.

Never had they fused so completely with each other, it seemed, as she returned to consciousness of the world outside. Never had they given so utterly of themselves. In that limbo between feeling and thought her hand moved over his body in a possessive caress. She would not have resented it now had he opened his eyes and spoken of her femaleness; but his eyes stayed closed and but for his lips nuzzling her throat she would have thought he was asleep.

He was not asleep; he was spent but still desirous, waiting until they would embark together again on that indescribable flight. Again she ran her hand, light and urgent, over his body to hasten the moment.

It came; flared and blazed and died again.

She drew away from him at last, reluctantly, when the seeking of his hands and his lips alone could assuage his unassuageable desire.

The face the bathroom mirror showed her was hardly hers, the mouth heavy with kisses taken and given, the eyelids heavy above eyes that still smouldered. She moved in a daze of sensual fulfilment, wondering at her own transformed image.

Later, as the coffee bubbled up in the percolator, she heard him in the bathroom and the sound of the shower running shocked her out of her trance. He was getting ready to leave.

When she carried the tray from the kitchen he was standing by the window fully dressed, looking out through the etching of jacaranda boughs.

He said: 'You should move.'

'Why? It's so beautiful here.'

'Too many people know you round this way.'

Her hand shook as she poured out the coffee as he liked it, strong and black with a spoonful of cream weaving arabesques on the top.

'You ought to get a place in one of those skyscraper home-unit blocks with stunning views.'

'And a stunning price. Besides, they're too big and impersonal.'

'The price could be fixed, and as for size and impersonality, isn't that what you want?'

'I? No, I've never wanted that.'

'Then we.'

There was a note of irritability in his voice. He drank the coffee thirstily, and passed his cup for the second.

The 'we' sent a shiver of joy through her, and as she watched him eating ravenously, femaleness softened to femininity. She repeated 'We?' on a note of surprise.

'You know what I mean by we,' he said impatiently. 'You can't do without me any more than I can do without you; but this block is too small, too many people around know us. If you had a different kind of place I could drop in without anyone being any the wiser.'

'Is that what you want?'

'For God's sake, Tempe, don't let us shuffle. We both know what we want. We've had long enough to find out. I'll be frank. I thought I could do without you. But I can't. Living without you is like cutting off an arm or a leg.'

She smiled at the inadequacy of his simile and he read it as something else. 'Oh yes, I know. I've got everything that I wanted; but I've also found out you can get all you want and then still want something more. Now I can see there's no reason why we shouldn't have it.'

'When did you get this idea?'

'Not till today. When I saw you again everything I've been trying to clamp down on blew up like a volcano.'

He watched her anxiously, and when she said nothing went on, with a tone of urgency.

'I'll pay the money for a place in any of the big blocks, in your name. Don't worry about the expense. I'll be responsible for that. I'll give you enough to live on and I'll make a will in your favour. My wife will have more than enough for her and the kids.'

'What about your life with her?'

'That'll be all right. She's satisfied with her side of the bargain. She won't care what time I come home—so long as I come home. Take your pick of one of the luxury home-

units available. Only one thing I want—it mustn't be far off my route home.'

For a bleak moment she saw herself perpetually waiting for him to come and watching him go, and asked herself whether it was better than the desolation and the loneliness of her life without him.

At her silence he got up abruptly and came behind her chair, slid his hands under her chin and tilted her face up to his. She saw him upside down, grotesquely magnified as he bent over and pressed his mouth against hers as though he'd been away a long time. His hands slid inside her gown, cupping her breasts. With his chin against her head he whispered urgently:

'Say yes, quickly. We can't do without each other. You fascinating witch! I knew what you wanted when you came in today. You should have done it before. We can't afford to waste so much life.'

She turned in her chair dislodging his hands. 'That wasn't what I came for, Keith. I'll be as honest as you. Deep down I wanted it, but I didn't come for it. I came to ask you to help the people at Whaler's, and that means my granddaughter.'

He made an extravagant gesture, as though throwing some absurd request out of their lives.

'Oh that! I knew that was only an excuse.'

'It wasn't an excuse at all.' She stood up, knocking the chair over in the suddenness of her movement. 'I came to ask you to do something for me. What has happened here is outside that.'

He brushed her explanation aside. 'I told you this afternoon, I can't do anything about it. You haven't a chance, anyway.'

'You've always said with the Press behind one there was nothing one couldn't do.'

'I can't do this. If it got out that the kid's your grandchild I'd be finished.'

'It need never be known. We'd keep it a dead secret.'

'Nothing's secret for long. It'd get out that you're involved in it and where'd I be? Out on my ear.'

'I don't recognize you. You're a different man.'

'I don't recognize you, either. Don't you realize it won't do you any good for it to be known that you've got a half-caste granddaughter?'

'I never expected you to talk like that.'

'I never expected you to talk like this. You usen't to be one to fight for lost causes.'

'You always said "Give me a cause to believe in and I'll fight for it."'

'This isn't a cause I believe in, that's all.'

'Do you believe in anything?'

'I believe in looking after Number One.'

'That's horrible.'

'Maybe it is, but I've sacrificed too much in my life to get where I am to risk losing it now.'

'You certainly sacrificed me.'

'I sacrificed myself too. Now I'm where I swore I'd get, and I'm staying there.'

She sat down, feeling her legs tremble. 'It's amazing.'

'I don't see anything amazing about it. It's logical.'

He bent and, resting his hands on the arms of the chair, looked mockingly at her. 'Speak up,' he said, in a half-jocular way. 'What's amazing about me except...'

She turned her face away. She could not find words to answer him. Between them there had never been argument. She had been content with her role as the feminine counterpart of his masculine world. In the months that she'd been alone she realized that all her views on anything outside her own purely feminine world were his views, and

even in that intimate personal world he was the loadstone of all she did. When for the first time, their wills crossed, she lacked the words to combat him.

She had always admired his skill in argument, and praised his victory as he argued the case again when they were alone. She had envied the facility with which the right phrase and the right word came to him. On the rare occasions when she got into argument anywhere she was always irritated that the brilliant thoughts came to her afterwards. Alone, she thought of all the things she should have said and didn't, but Keith said them, and now she listened to him silently and wondered how many times he had won an argument and the defeated had gone away silent but unconvinced as she was.

In her helplessness she warmed to the thought of her silent obstinate son who was either dumb or argued back so clumsily that you were astonished at his muddleheadedness. She knew you could be unable to sort out the threads of your thoughts and yet beneath that your will could be clear and unbreakable.

Keith rubbed his nose gently against hers.

'You haven't told me what's amazing about me yet.'

'I wasn't thinking of you, I was thinking of Christopher. It's amazing that a boy so young should have seen both of us so clearly for what we are.'

He jerked himself upright. 'Frankly, I'm not interested in what that jealous young pup thought of me, and it seems rather late for you to be indulging in maternal sentimentality about a son who's been dead six years.'

'It's late. Too late as far as he's concerned, but not so far as his daughter's concerned.'

'Since you're wrapped up in the kid, why don't you adopt her? You'll only ever make anything of her if you get her away from that Abo crowd she's in with.'

'She's not *in* with them, she's one of them; and they're not an Abo crowd, they're the finest family I've ever met, with more sense of loyalty and decency than anyone I've had to deal with.'

'There's no use arguing the point. Look! if you haven't got enough money to send the kid to boarding school then I'll fix that, too, so long as I don't have to see her. You know I hate kids. What do you say to that as a bargain? I'm prepared to make you financially safe.'

'There are things money can't buy.'

'Christ Almighty, don't start giving me that crap. I'll vomit if I have to listen to another platitude like that. It isn't you. And I'll tell you, here and now, that there's nothing in this world money can't buy.'

'You're wrong.'

'Could be, but not nearly so wrong as you are.' He slid his hands into his pockets in the gesture she had so often seen, pushing back the coat from his hips, jingling the keys in his pocket, a stance he liked to take in argument.

He eyed her speculatively. 'I wonder whether you're only dramatizing yourself to get better terms. If not, you're mad, woman, quite mad. I never thought you'd throw away something you wanted for an idiotic grandmotherly idea. I'm prepared to take that in with you, like all the other things that I'm not particularly keen about if one comes to doing an accountancy of pros and cons. Only count me out of it. You can do what you like about this new bug of yours as long as I'm not involved in any way. I know what I want and I'm prepared to pay for it, and there isn't any woman in your position or any man in mine who wouldn't consider that I'm being reasonable to the point of generosity.'

'Was it generosity to live with me for fifteen years under promise of marriage and then throw me over for a woman who could provide you with the job you wanted and

enough money to keep me as a sideline for the rest of your life? '

He stood looking at her with his head on one side, and she knew that when he gave that twisted, cruel smile he was getting ready to deliver the death blow.

'This is an unsuspected phase of your character! ' he said sardonically. 'The seriousness with which you took your role as a supersaleswoman in the conspicuous consumption racket always amused me. I don't think you ever realized quite what a hypocrite you were. Most women don't. You wouldn't dare face the fact that everything that goes on between breakfast and bedtime is only a prelude to what you're all waiting for all the time.'

She shook her head violently.

'Oh, I'm not saying men don't like it this way. The difference is that we have a life to live out of bed in which every thought and every action isn't a preparation for when we get there.'

She put up her arm as though to protect herself.

'Tell me one thing in your life that hasn't been designed for the one aim and end of your existence? I liked you that way. I could have gone on with you, so it seems, till you wore me out. But there was something else I wanted more, and so I left you. I wouldn't have come back if you hadn't made the first step. And you did it—a very cunning, very high-minded approach, the same old elegant, cool Tempe, smouldering like a hot coal underneath, and all the things I fought against successfully since I left you flared up again. Unfortunately that's something neither of us can do anything about. You've bewitched me with your female—'

'Stop it! '

'Why? I've said that in a dozen different ways admittedly more delicate and you've always purred like a cat at what you took for compliments—'



She hid her face in her hands, to hide from herself his face, stripped of all the things she had loved in it, sharp with his contempt of her.

‘And there’s no use snivelling. You should know that I was never moved by tears.’

He strode to the glass doors and looked out on the sky already lightening with another day. When he opened the door the fresh dawn wind blew in. He closed it again with a gesture of exasperation and came back to stand in front of her accusingly.

‘For God’s sake stop it. All that I’m saying now has been said some way or other all our lives together. I could have respected you for it if you’d come back honestly to me and said—Oh well, there’s no need to go over that—But I despise you when you come back with a cock-and-bull story completely out of character, push yourself into my world, and when I offer you something only a little less than you had before go all moral on me.’

He went to her with one of his swift gestures, pulled her to her feet and stood running his hands down her shoulders, her back, her hips.

‘Will it satisfy you if I tell you that this is what I do in imagination when I go to bed with my wife? I’m sure she thinks I’m a cold fish because I sleep with her only when I can’t bear being without you any more.’

The point of Pannish light she knew so well glowed in his eyes.

‘No, he’s not Pan any more,’ she thought; ‘he’s a satyr gone to seed.’

She lifted his hands from her hips and stood back from him.

‘Don’t touch me,’ she said, as he moved to take her again. ‘You make me feel dirty.’

‘I’ll make you feel what I feel.’

‘Not any more, Keith. I may be all the things you say, but at least I was honest about you. But you don’t know what honesty is. You didn’t even recognize it as honesty when I came to you and asked you to help me.’

‘Oh no, don’t let me hear any more of that.’

He drew the back of his hand across his eyes as though to extinguish the fires that had begun to burn in them.

‘I’m sorry, you leave me no choice.’ She was glad that her voice was steady.

‘What the hell are you tragedy-queening about now?’

‘I shall go to your wife.’

The colour went out of his face. ‘You’ll go to my wife? What about?’

‘I’ll ask her to help my grandchild. If you, as editor, cannot influence policy enough to run a story that’s a good news story, a human story in keeping with your professed principles, because you’re afraid, then I’ll ask her. Perhaps she’ll have some influence with her father. She seems to have had a lot up till now, and I’m sure she won’t have any less now that she’s given him twin grandchildren.’

‘You can’t do that. It’s a mean, vindictive, woman’s trick. I never thought you were that kind of woman.’

‘We’re even. I never thought you were that kind of man.’

‘Listen, Tempe,’ he leaned forward, his hands pressing the edge of the table. ‘If you go near my wife, I’ll ruin you. And don’t think this is any light threat. If you do this I’ll see you never get another job. You must know that you were kept on at the T.V. station only because I put in a word for you. They had so many complaints that they had to get rid of you. Why in God’s name can’t you be reasonable? I’ve offered you more than any other man in my position would offer you. What more do you want than what I can give you?’

He pulled her to him, fumbling with the fastening of her gown. She felt the urgency of his tense loins.

'You lovely bitch—you bitch—on perpetual heat.'

She stood rigid, dreading the familiar sweet yielding of her limbs. It did not come. Something beyond it nerved the hand that hit him across the face with a strength she did not know she possessed.

She stood, incredulous, watching him pass his hand with the same dazed incredulity across his mouth.

She heard the door close quietly. 'Cautious to the last!' Then she went to the bathroom and stood for a long time under the shower, running it alternately hot and cold to wash the night out of her body and her mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

She woke late with the sun streaming across her bed and lay watching the tree-shadows on the wall, surprised at the lucidity of her mind. Waking had been her worst time. She used to lie with her eyes closed, fighting against the necessity of taking up the meaningless round. Now the sensuous half-waking reverie before thought took over was gone. Gone, too, the pain that had been with her for so long and the arid dreariness that settled on her with the return to reality.

She did not recognize the cold sharpening of mind and senses as hate because she had never hated anybody before. She knew only that a new force drove her out of bed; her mind planned and organized almost without volition. She had thought that last night would haunt her for ever, but there are some things which by their own violence annul

memory. Keith was deadlier to her than Christopher would ever be.

She took her brunch to the balcony. A piercing westerly had sprung up in the night, but the sheltered sun porch was warm. Gusts of wind whipped to white foam the cobalt waters of the bay where the yachts strained at their moorings. Pendulum-like, the tall bamboo swayed its green swords, the transparent tips of the gums moved in changing patterns, and an occasional dying leaf glowed red among the olive green.

She looked at the motoring guide to see the way to Keith's home; dressed carefully feeling that beauty and elegance were weapons to be used pitilessly on a plain and crippled woman. They would penetrate even the shield of wealth and power. She planned what she would say and how she would say it.

She put Keith's gold cigarette-case in her handbag. He had not noticed that it had fallen from his coat. A nice piece of evidence to show any wife. Not for revenge, she told herself, but to get what she wanted.

She thought with something of a shock that what she was planning to do was blackmail and the satisfaction that it gave her was a blackmailer's satisfaction. An ugly way of fighting, but when you have no clean weapons you use dirty ones.

She waited till mid-afternoon, when Keith should be well settled in, before she rang the editor's room. She knew he didn't believe she would go to his wife. He would never imagine that she had the courage. Still, she did not want to take any chances.

Difficult to know whether his secretary's voice really hardened when she deliberately gave her name, or whether it was only her normal protective manner of informing the caller that the editor was in conference. 'Ask him if he

would call me back when he's free, will you? I'll be in all day.'

She hung up, the words bile in her mouth. She could imagine the look on the woman's face as she prepared to give Keith the message that would by its implication smash through the editor's impersonal façade. The editor's room was like a bullet-proof cell in which he was impervious to all outside attacks. Then the picture shifted in her mind and she saw it like an armoured tank rolling remorselessly over flesh and blood. But even a tank was vulnerable. Throw a bottle of petrol in and—Kaput! That was what she was doing.

Deep down his secretary would relish it—his staff admired Keith but they didn't like him; it was said that he had no friends on the job (she used to think that was jealousy) and that he'd sell his mother for a pint of printer's ink. For the first time she wondered if it was not so much love of printer's ink but of the power it represented. He loved power more than anything—or anyone. Power was vulnerable, too, if you had the right weapons.

She was ready at last. She was glad the westerly justified her wearing her Persian lamb coat. Her job had taught her never to ask for anything that you appeared to need. Those who already had too much got things easily, but the poorly-dressed woman was at a disadvantage from the start even though, or perhaps because, it was obvious that she needed what she asked for. Glad, too, she hadn't carried out her plan to sell the big car. Now she needed every ostentatious weapon.

The sun was low when she came out on a high point of the Pacific Highway, and against its light the distant line of the mountains stretched in a purple rampart against a sky from which the wind had driven cloud and colour. She wondered, as she wound her way through the tree-lined

streets with the big houses set back in well-kept gardens, how Keith liked this embodiment of upper suburbanism at which he had always sneered. Perhaps he had been contemptuous of it only because he did not have it. He'd been a man without roots because he'd had no place in which to set down roots. Now he had it, perhaps his roots would go deeply into the rich earth in which stock-brokers and judges and the upper crust of urban life flourished.

He used to laugh at Robert for sending Christopher to what he had always called a 'snob school'. His children, in turn, would go inevitably to a 'snob school', so he would himself have to put on the outer trappings of the world in which he lived and his family belonged or else be a stranger to it and to them.

She drove up to the imposing wrought-iron gates of the Robertson mansion that had been one of Sydney's show places since the mid-thirties, and tooted to attract the attention of a gardener's boy raking the drive. Arrogance was the line. Go cap in hand to beg and the gate would stay shut in her face. The boy came and looked through the gate uncertainly.

She called to him: 'Open it for me, will you, please? Mrs Masters is expecting me, and I'm late.'

She gave him her dazzling smile, seeing the doubt fade from his face as he unlocked the gate. And in that act she realized that Keith feared her sufficiently to have the gate locked, for there wasn't a home that she'd ever visited in the whole of Australia where people locked their gates. She called a gay thanks as she swept past him into the long drive that curved up the slope through the gardens, the trees and the perfect lawns to the large two-storey house.

Humming to herself she ran up the steps aware that she was being watched from the balcony, pressed the bell and

heard its mellow chime somewhere in the depths of the house.

A middle-aged woman half-opened the door and stood without speaking, hostility exuding from every pore of her solid body.

Tempe put on her most gracious manner.

'I'm late. Will you please tell Mrs Masters I'm here?'

'I'm sorry, but—' the woman hesitated, looking cautiously back into the hall.

Her movement left room for Tempe to slide past. Long trained to service, she stepped back involuntarily in surprise, but quickly recovered and said firmly: 'I'm sorry, madam, but Mrs Masters is not seeing anybody.'

'My good woman, don't be stupid. Mrs Masters is expecting me.'

She swept past her to the foot of the wide stairway that wound in a graceful ogive to the upper floor. 'Take me up to her please.'

The woman moved briskly to the foot of the stairs and put an arm on the stair-rail. 'I've told you, madam, Mrs Masters is seeing no one. If you wish to leave a message—'

Tempe eyed her, realizing that she'd lost the first round.

She ran her eyes from the top of the iron-grey head down the solid body in a grey woollen frock, to her equally solid shoes, and said: 'Really, this is a most extraordinary reception. I come here to see Mrs Masters and you behave like a keeper in a mental hospital. There's nothing wrong with Mrs Masters, is there?'

'I'm afraid you'll have to leave, madam,' the woman said, with the same expressionless stolidity.

Tempe simulated anger. 'I assure you I'll certainly write to your mistress, and complain about your extraordinary behaviour.'

'As you wish, madam. I must ask you to go now. Mrs Masters is not to be disturbed.'

Tempe turned with the swing she had perfected in long years of modelling, head held high, mouth scornful, and stopped, as a voice called from the stairs: 'Mrs Rowntree, please show Mrs Caxton up. I've been waiting for her.'

The woman's impassive face quickened in a startled glance towards the stairhead. She said confusedly: 'Oh yes, yes, of course, Miss Elspeth, she's coming,' and fixed on Tempe eyes full of malignity.

'This way, madam, please.'

Tempe ran up the stairs, saying too loud and too heartily: 'How nice to see you again. You look wonderful.'

The other woman put a false effusiveness into her voice: 'I—I was afraid you weren't coming.'

At the top of the stairs they stood face to face, looking at each other intently as though to read some secret that could not be spoken. So this was Keith's wife, Elspeth. A pretty name. A pretty face. When they began to walk down the wide, thickly-carpeted corridor hung with large gilt-framed portraits she realized with an acid satisfaction that no prettiness would ever make you forget the shambling legs she half-dragged, half-pushed with the aid of a stick and steel supports and which occasionally showed their shape with the movement of her long housecoat.

She led the way into a small sitting-room that opened on to the balcony, where the last sun shone across a double bassinet. Crippled, deformed, this woman had yet borne the children Keith would never let her have.

Hate uncoiled in her like a snake ready to strike, and she turned back to Elspeth who was leaning as though for support against the closed door.

'How did you know who I was?'

Elspeth's lips were quivering but she forced them into a



pained smile. 'I recognized you from the T.V. I've always been a fan of yours. I suppose it was wish-fulfilment.' She pressed her quivering lower lip with her hand. 'Sit down, will you? This chair, please. That is my special one.'

Before so much diffidence triumph receded. Tempe said 'I must apologize for my intrusion.'

'That's all right. It's lucky that I saw you from the balcony.'

'Do they usually make it so hard for people to see you?'

Elsbeth flushed at the irony in her voice. 'No.' She hesitated, her eyelids half-lowered as though she didn't wish to meet Tempe's eyes. 'You mustn't get a wrong impression from what happened today. Though I'm handicapped in some ways I'm quite a normal human being.'

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. It's just——'

'I know. It seems odd, but——' She raised her lids and looked straight at Tempe. Her eyes were a pure grey, large and luminous, seeming too large in the small face with the peaked chin and the tilted nose.

Judging her professionally, Tempe thought: 'I could really make something of that face, and the thick pale hair she's wearing in that too-heavy coil.'

With a malice directed at Keith rather than at the woman, she enjoyed the thought of him tortured by the disharmony between the youthful upper half of her body and her broad, squat hips and spindle legs.

Somewhere between the two thoughts she asked herself compassionately how did a woman live with herself when she was hideous to her own eyes as well as to other people's? She'd known plain women, ugly women, who developed poised personalities that made you forget their faces because they themselves forgot them. But Elspeth would never be unaware of her body when her every movement

was hampered, when she had always those booted feet and iron-supports thrust out before her.

She had come prepared for conflict with a woman who was arrogant and dominant because money could buy anything and anyone for her. But the tremulous lips and the eyes that had eluded hers revealed sensitiveness so acute that it was painful to be in touch with it. You didn't have to be clever to find ways of hurting a woman like this. With that thought the desire to hurt her because she was Keith's wife splintered like a sheet of ice.

'I'm sorry I had to come like this. There was no other way, and I had to talk to you.'

Elspeth opened her mouth, closed it again, wiped a handkerchief across her lips, asking softly: 'Are you sure it's not my husband you want to speak to?'

So the duel was joined without Tempe having any part in the opening thrust.

She hoped her eyes were as clear and honest as Elspeth's. 'No,' she said, realizing that here only honesty would help her. 'I saw him yesterday, and he refused to do anything for me. I think that's probably the reason for the curious reception I got when I arrived.'

Elspeth sat staring at her, her face entirely without expression, her eyes defenceless as a child's. Ridiculous that she gave such an impression of childishness. She must be thirty, and yet not even the ageing hair-do, the full breasts of a young mother, nor the broad ungainly hips could take from her the childish air.

She licked her lips, nervously, and wrung the handkerchief through hands like the perfect rounded hands of Madonnas in Renaissance paintings. 'I'm sorry, Mrs Caxton, but I'm afraid I don't understand anything at all. Will you please tell me why you've come here today?'

'I came to ask you to use your influence for something I

want very badly, not for myself, but for my grandchild.'

Elsbeth stirred in her chair; her hands were quiet for a moment. 'Your grandchild?'

'My granddaughter, to be exact.'

'You don't look old enough to have a granddaughter.'

'I have. She's five. My son married very early and without our knowledge. He was only eighteen. As I look back on it I think his father and I both behaved very badly when he told us he was in love. When he was sent with his unit to Malaya we didn't try to stop his going. On the contrary, we used our influence to have him sent because we thought it was the best thing. We didn't know we were sending him to real danger.

'I've blamed myself often enough over the years, but at the time it seemed the right thing, the only thing to do. You'll understand our feelings if I tell you that the girl he was in love with was a half-caste. I don't know how you look at these things. My experiences in the last week have jolted me so completely out of my old prejudices that I can hardly remember now why I was so horrified at the idea six years ago.

'He married her before he went. He didn't tell us about it. No one told us that he had a daughter nor that his wife died when the child was born. It was only a week ago that I got a letter which told me everything. I wonder if you'll understand what it means for a woman who thought that she was alone to find out suddenly that she has a grandchild. To be lonely is a frightening thing.'

'I can't imagine you in your kind of life ever being lonely.'

'Don't be misled by the glamorous façade. It's very nice to look at but not very satisfying. My stock in trade isn't a lasting one. A woman needs more than that when she's facing middle age.'

‘I think you’re beautiful. You don’t look a bit different from when I first started watching you and envying you on T.V.’

Her voice was so genuinely warm that Tempe was moved by it, but she did not want pity to disarm her.

‘The news came to me at the end of a serious illness, and the knowledge that I had someone of my own blood was just the lifeline I needed. So I flew up to the place where she lives on the North Coast and found that, what was more important, Kristina needed me.

‘To be frank, I’ve always been terrified of the thought of having a grandchild. It seemed as though that would be the end of my life. Now I know it’s the beginning of another. I can’t tell you what joy it is to see all kinds of little quirks coming out in her that I’ve forgotten in my son.’

She paused, wondering how to bring Whaler’s alive to the woman who was following every word with palpable interest. ‘I got to know the Aborigine family to which her mother belonged. They had sent for me because they are threatened with eviction from their home on Whaler’s. It’s an idyllic spot—I understand why my son fell in love not only with the girl but with the place. There’s a wholesomeness about it all. The people there are not corrupted like us. I want my granddaughter to grow up there.’

Under Elspeth’s rapt gaze she poured out the story as she had not dared to tell it to Keith. ‘Maybe you think I’m sentimental, but the way they live, the way they earn their living from the sea and the plantation seems so sane. They mustn’t be sent away from Whaler’s either to one of those Aboriginal stations, which are a disgrace in a supposedly civilized society or, even worse, to Redfern slums.’

She stopped. It was a long time before Elspeth spoke: ‘I sympathize with you, but I don’t see how I can be of

any help to you. I lead a very quiet life. If money would help I would be very glad.'

'This isn't a question of money. Thank you all the same. This is a question of stirring up public opinion to stop what may be happening even while I'm talking to you here. The only way that can be done is through a newspaper.'

'Then ... it is certainly my husband ...'

'I told all this to your husband. He refused.'

'Why?'

'He said it was against the paper's policy. That he was the editor, not the proprietor, and that the proprietor would not be interested in it. Oh, he had all kinds of excellent reasons, all of which came down to the point that he didn't want to do it.'

'Not even for you?'

Tempe hesitated, reluctant to answer a question which she did not know how to judge. Was it the question of a glamour-struck girl who thought no one could resist her idol? Or was it a question of a woman who knew all there was to know about Keith and her? Elspeth had sunk lower in the chair, her fingers intertwined, pressing the palms together and releasing them 'hen repeating the gesture.

'Will you please answer me just one question, Mrs Caxton? Was Christopher my husband's son as well as yours?'

The question came to Tempe as such a shock that she could not answer it. With a few words the wife had taken out of her hands the weapon she intended to use for her final thrust.

She shook her head.

Elspeth bowed her face into her hands and held them pressed tightly against it. Tempe waited for the sobs to burst out, but when she lowered them her eyes were dry.

'Mrs Caxton, you've been talking to me all the time as

though I didn't know anything about the relationship between you and my husband, but someone sent me an anonymous letter some months after we were married. Did you think I'd have married him—knowing? '

Tempe had no answer.

Elsbeth smiled wanly: 'You may be right. We can fool ourselves about anything we want badly enough. I know people think that I used my father's position and power to buy my husband. That's not true. Don't think that I'm so naïve and silly that I didn't know what Keith was after in the long run, but I thought he also liked me. He seemed to like being with me. He would sit and I'd play to him. He brought me books and we discussed them together. We talked about lots of interesting things.

'It wasn't the Great Romance romantic novelists write about—they should be locked up as perverters of youth. I thought our friendship was a good substitute and that perhaps after his own tragic experience so early in his marriage, friendship was all that he had to give. Besides, who could fall in love with me?

'Perhaps I felt worse about being like this because, before I got polio when I was nearly fifteen, I was crazy about ballet. My father let me go to lessons with Borovansky, who said I had talent. It made me very vain. I used to spend a lot of time admiring myself in the mirror in my tutu. My father loved me to dance for him.

'Of course he spoiled me, but you see he was married nearly twenty years before I was born and he loved my mother very much. I was only five when she died—in this house. All the love he had for her he gave to me. I know people say he's a hard man. Perhaps I'm his only soft spot. That's the side of him I know and worship. I think my having polio was as big a pain to him as my mother's death; worse, perhaps; that was a clean break, while mine was a

lifetime sentence to disappointment and grief—for me, not for himself, because nobody could be tenderer or kinder or more infinitely thoughtful of me.

‘You’re probably thinking I’m a neurotic, spoiled woman. Perhaps I am, but the trouble is that’s how I am. Oh yes, I know I have the reputation of being very sweet. I’ve never had any reason to be anything but sweet. Everything in the house was designed for me. (We lived in Melbourne then.) The staff was picked and trained to treat me as though it was quite normal that I should go round first on crutches and with my legs in supports and then on sticks. My father had a heated swimming pool made for me. I had friends, but only the daughters of men who were in some way indebted to my father. It might have been better if I’d had to earn my own living, go out and face’ things. One can be too protected.

‘I had governesses—very good ones. It might have been better if I had been sent back to school. At least then I would have got accustomed early to seeing the pity and the revulsion in people’s eyes.’

‘Oh no.’

‘Oh yes. I read them in yours, too, when you first saw me. I never had to face up to life until my father took me for a world tour when I was nineteen. The whole awful reality poured over me on the ship—all the other young girls dancing and playing; I couldn’t even do the one thing I enjoyed doing—swimming. We used to have our meals in our stateroom to spare me crossing the dining-room; so people didn’t see me often.

‘That was the most terrible time of my life. On the deck lounge chair, my legs covered with a rug, young men would stop and start up one of those shipboard flirtations. I can still remember the gooey-eyed young man who came for three days. On the fourth day he came just as my father was

settling me on to the lounge and I saw his face full of horror and, yes, pity. Most people are kind. It's only they don't think you're really human when you're like I am.'

'My dear, that's not true.'

'You see, you call me "my dear" as if I were a child you wanted to comfort. I fell in love with Keith because he was the first man who ever looked at me without the shadow in his eyes that people learn to banish quickly. Probably he'd been warned before he came. Whatever it was, all the years he was coming to our place in Melbourne I never caught him out. When he took me out in the car or the boat he behaved just like my father. He let me do things for myself, even though I did them badly.

'I took it at first that he came because he was my father's friend and didn't have a normal personal life himself. I never really thought he would care about me other than as a friend. I'd be lying if I said I didn't dream about it like every other lonely girl. He destroyed my interest in other men. When he asked me to marry him I couldn't believe it was possible. Not that it was the first time anyone had offered to marry me. There had been younger men, not so skilled in hiding the fact that they were fortune-hunting in one way or another. Keith wasn't after money. He wanted something else, and I was the way to get it.

'It would have been better if I'd married one of the more blatant seekers after the things my father's money could give. I would have gone into it with my eyes open, and I wouldn't have been handicapped by being grateful to him because I'd have known it was a *quid pro quo*. I was grateful to Keith for giving me, not only marriage but what I took for love, based on a very good companionship.

'I was terribly innocent when he married me. I suppose it's a contradiction today: twenty-eight years old and innocent. Do you know I'd never been kissed properly? So



much easy kissing is the outcome of things young people normally do together—dancing together and playing sport together and petting in cars on the way home. It's much harder—even as part of a calculated plan—to kiss somebody who is forced to passivity. Keith worked up to it gradually. Quite early on he'd give me a kiss on the cheek when he met me or if I was sitting down when he came he'd drop on kiss on my hair, unpassionate kisses into which I read all kinds of things. When this continued for six years, I thought he must be a very special non-sensual kind of man and I revered him for it.'

Her voice went on, low and hurried, but Tempe did not hear it. Those six years had burst in her face like a bomb and her mind went off at a tangent and came back to hear Elspeth saying, 'So you see, when his wife died, and he asked me to marry him, I literally fell into his arms.'

'On our honeymoon my first wild careless rapture—who was it said that?—was inhibited by the problem of taking off my irons and my obsession about keeping my legs covered.

'The first part of our honeymoon was quite platonic. It took him quite a time to warm up. I thought perhaps he was impotent. When at last he became my husband in fact, I was so crazy with delight to find that I was quite normal in that way that if he had any inadequacies I didn't recognize them.

'I had five wonderful months in which I tried to make up to him for what I thought were his lonely years. He was very kind and sweet to me.

'I was influenced by your T.V. session to try to look as glamorous as possible in the house and I took to wearing housegowns because they hid the worst part of me. In that way I didn't have to see his friends trying to keep their eyes away from my feet and legs. I spent as much money on

them as women do on their glamour evening dresses. When we were having a dinner party or I was going to one, I defied fashion and wore long frocks. Oh, you can't imagine what it is to feel yourself shrivel when someone's eyes follow you in surprise, or worse, the first time they see you walk.

'Then the letter came: a dirty letter. I wonder who could have been so cruel as to write it? I had the feeling it was a man; that he'd written it rather because he was jealous of the job Keith had got than anything else.

'I nearly went crazy. Then I found out I was going to have a baby, and that insulated me against the worst shock.

'I had a feeling that he was relieved when I found out I was pregnant, not because he wanted a child but because it gave him an excuse not to sleep with me.

'I thought my heart was broken when I first learned about you. Novelists don't tell you how tough the heart is nor how much it can bear. Within a month or a little more I knew that there were many parts to your heart and that you could live with part of it damaged as you live with your legs crippled. I found that being pregnant was its own satisfaction, and so I counted my blessings and was more or less content. Now I have my babies and I'm insulated for ever. I don't think they mean a thing to him but—if he stays with me—we'll have a house full of children since that's the one thing I can do as well as any other woman. My father will be delighted and I'm fiercely maternal.'

She put her hand over her eyes and sat silent while the seconds ticked out from the elegant little French clock on the *escritoire*. Her hand dropped suddenly and she said in a different voice: 'Did he go back to sleep with you when we came to live in Sydney?'

'No. I never saw him from the day the old editor had a heart-attack, until I went to him yesterday.'

'You went to him?'

'Yes. I rang up, and his secretary said he was too busy, and I said that I would sit outside his room and wait until he was free. I think that frightened him, so he came out and met me.'

'Where?'

'He took me first to a little tea shop. The coffee was vile and we went around to a cheap pub not frequented by anyone he would know.'

'He never went to see you?'

'No. He collected his things from my flat when I was abroad.'

Tempe met the luminous searching eyes with the sincere gaze she gave to her T.V. audience. Mentally she pushed the cigarette-case to the bottom of her bag, sickened at the thought of how low she had been prepared to sink.

'Thank you. I'm jealous and I couldn't have borne that. I've often wondered about him that way. I thought that a man who had been for all those years without a normal life would be rather—demanding, shall I say. Let me be honest. I hoped he'd be demanding. Does that shock you?'

'No.'

'It would most people. They'd think that a creature like me should be rather more high-minded.'

'I don't call that being high-minded at all.'

'It's different with you. You've always had men around you. I don't mean anything offensive about that. I envy you from the very depth of my soul.'

She rubbed her handkerchief over her lips. Clearly she wanted to ask something else. The words came, too loudly: 'Was he demanding?'

Tempe felt the blush run up her cheeks, down her throat, till it seemed that her whole body was blushing.

'Tell me the truth. Don't you see I have to know? I have to spend my life with him.'

She nodded reluctantly, shame pouring over her as though she was doing something indecent.

Elsbeth leaned back in her chair, with a long-drawn sigh.

'I thought so. Now, please bear with me. Just one more thing I want to know. Would you take him back now if he wanted to come?'

'No!'

The word shot out without thought or calculation. Only after she had spoken did Tempe know it was the truth. Now there were no terms at all on which she would have him back. What he had done was worse than any quick betrayal. A sudden crime you could pardon, but not a long, premeditated one.

Elsbeth's lips parted in a slow smile.

'Thank you. Now I can plan.'

She pressed the bell beside her chair. 'I'm sorry. I'm a bad hostess. I'll ring for tea.'

'You're hardly my hostess, so there's no need for apology.'

'Oh yes I am, since I invited you in once you got here. I happened to be on the balcony with the babies when I heard the gardener unlock the gate, and then Mrs Rown-tree behaving in that wardress fashion. You must forgive her. She's been with me ever since I was ill, and she takes things into her own hands. Not that it's her fault—this time. They all had their orders from Keith. I overheard her speaking to him on the phone before you arrived and she said no one had come. I wonder if he was trying to protect me or himself.'

'All of you, I think.'

'You're too kind.'

A maid wheeled in a low traymobile on which a lavish afternoon tea was set out with exquisite china, and what Keith always laughed at as 'heirloom silver'. Elspeth served deftly. When the maid went she said: 'You must forgive me for the way I've talked to you. I'm not that kind of woman really. As a rule I keep my thoughts very closely to myself. I think I would have liked you if I'd known you in other circumstances.'

'I don't expect you to like me.'

'Nor do I expect you to like me, but it's a pity all the same. I was frightened at first. I thought you were going to tell me that you wanted Keith back and I didn't know how I was going to keep my pride as well as him. I'm glad you came. The things that all my life I've said only to myself I've said to you today. While I've been talking to you so many things slid into place. You've dispelled a nightmare. Would you answer just one other question?'

'If I can.'

'In those six years before he married me, did you know that he was being very kind to someone else, sending books and gifts—writing her friendly letters that might be mistaken for affection? Was there anything at all that made you guess?'

Tempe shook her head slowly. She had no need to go back in her mind to re-examine those years. She had done it too often when he left her.

Elspeth sighed deeply. 'I rather feared that. Maybe it's a consolation to you, but it isn't to me.'

'It's not a consolation to me, and I don't see why you should be hurt by it. We each thought we had a different man, and we didn't, that's all. I fooled myself. You fooled yourself.'

'And now he's fooled himself.'

'How do you mean?'

‘He thought he was marrying a soft woman, but he’ll find now that I am hard. I won’t even be ashamed to be like—like this before him any more. That’s part of his price. He’s going to learn that if he can’t be a good husband he must be a good father. He won’t want to break our marriage for his own reasons. He’s going to stay in it for mine. It’s important for my children that they should have someone who will play with them when I can’t; teach them all the sports. I can only teach them music and swimming. My father’s having our pool here enlarged. He’s building a home for us on Pittwater so we’ll be able to have family yachting parties, where Keith will teach the children to sail.’

She paused, with the radiant face of a child before a Christmas tree. ‘Can you imagine after all my grey years what it’s like to have full life to look forward to?’

‘Yes. When Keith left me I wept not only for the loss of him but for the loss of all the life I’d built up with him. I thought I’d die but I didn’t. I was really desperate only when I saw my profession passing from me—if one can call so trivial a thing a profession. I realized later that I was desperate because the Beauty cult left me with nothing solid to live for. Now I have the chance of showing my granddaughter that there’s a life for women when looks fade and love goes.’

‘Will you be happy that way?’

‘Frankly I don’t know. And at this stage, I don’t care. I was happy with Keith and where did it get me? Now at least I’ll be living for something solid. Let me come back in a year or five years and tell you how it works out.’

‘You’re very sure of yourself.’

‘If I give that impression it’s a misleading one. I’m not sure of myself at all. Why should I be? How could I be? Up to date I’ve been a failure at everything I’ve done.’

The door burst open and they both swung round in shocked surprise.

‘Why, Daddy darling!’ Elspeth exclaimed. ‘What a wonderful surprise!’

David Robertson bent to kiss her, then stood with his hands resting on her shoulders as though to defend her. Physically he towered above them, broad as well as tall, with bald, domed head, bushy eyebrows and broad, projecting jaws, dominant and dominating. Not many men lived up to the legend that grew up about them. He did. Tempe knew now why his staff feared him.

‘You’re not strong enough to be having visitors,’ he said, looking accusingly from his daughter to Tempe.

Elspeth laughed. ‘I’ve never felt better in my life.’

Meeting his eyes, Tempe realized that the expression was one of fear as well as hate.

Elspeth put her hand on his ‘Why didn’t you ring and say you were coming and I’d have been at the airport to meet you.’ Her voice was warm, but her eyes guarded, as she said gaily: ‘You must meet Mrs Caxton—if you haven’t met her before? After all, she has been the most interesting session on your programme for years. I’ve been trying to tell her how much I owe ‘‘ her.’

He turned his eyes suspiciously from Tempe to Elspeth. His voice was as hard as his face. ‘I didn’t know you knew Mrs Caxton.’

‘Only as a personality to date, but—now, here we are! We’ve been gossiping for hours. We have many interests in common.’

Elspeth gave a surprisingly carefree laugh. But he continued his frowning glare, the embodiment of a watchdog on guard.

She pulled herself up from the chair, taking his arm to help her. ‘I might have guessed you’d fly over the first

day I was home with the babies. Come along then. I won't make you wait.' She held out a hand to Tempe as she moved towards the door: 'Please do come, Mrs Caxton. We've been so busy talking we haven't had a minute to go and see them.'

\* \* \* \* \*

She drew back the mosquito net that covered the double bassinet. Robertson's expression softened as he bent over the babies adoringly.

'This is Deborah Elspeth, after my mother: she's blonde like her. And this, David Robertson, after his grandfather. Don't you think he's like him? Look at that forehead and that nose that's going to be an eagle's beak later on.'

'Nonsense,' Robertson's tone softened the word. 'They look like all other babies, pink and shapeless. As for an eagle's beak—a lump of dough, nothing else. Are the doctor and nurse satisfied with their progress?' he asked anxiously.

'More than. They're gaining weight steadily. I'll show you their charts later.' She dropped the curtain, smiling at Tempe. 'He can't bear not to check on their weight and their habits every day.'

Tempe thought: They may bear Keith's name but they're Robertson babies.

Elspeth drew her father into the room. 'And now come and sit down while I tell you what I want you to do for Mrs Caxton.'

He stood, frowning at Tempe. 'I can't see that there's anything I can do for Mrs Caxton.'



'Oh yes, there is. You just sit down here and I'll light your cigar for you, and then you can listen to what she has to tell you. Or better still, I'll tell you. She must be worn out talking about it.'

He sat unwillingly. She lit his cigar, then told him the story of Whaler's, bringing the place and the people alive: Christopher and Kristina, her foster-parents and relatives.

Her father listened, his eyes on his cigar, his face revealing nothing. Obviously he was unmoved by the tragedy of Christopher and Zanny, untouched by Kristina's predicament, unconcerned with the fate of Whaler's.

When she had finished he looked searchingly at Elspeth, seeking for something more than she had told him, then turned his puzzled eyes on Tempe.

'Why did you come to my daughter?'

'I thought she would be able to get publicity for me.'

'Surely the sensible thing to do was go direct to the papers.'

Elspeth gave him a light slap.

'My dear Daddy, don't pretend to be so simple. You know perfectly well that it's impossible to get anything into the paper that doesn't suit its policy.'

'Mrs Caxton no doubt already knows that, so why waste time coming here?'

'Because she knows that if you take up the case they have a chance of winning.'

He grunted and stared at them, obviously searching for some clue to the extraordinary situation of finding his daughter in friendly contact with 'the other woman' she was not supposed to know about. Nearly all that mattered to him was her happiness. Somewhere there was a threat to her. Was it only in Tempe's existence? Or was there something else?

He said flatly: 'I'm against personal interference in the paper's policy.'

A baby whimpered, and he got up and went on to the balcony where a uniformed nurse suddenly appeared.

Elspeth put a warning finger to her lips.

When the baby was quiet, he came back and leant against her chair. Laughing, she laid a hand on his arm. 'You've no idea how wonderful he is with babies. I've decided he must move up here to help me bring them up. Let's fix up the old wing, Daddy. We'll all adore having you.'

The frowning face was suddenly transformed by the flash that lit the cold eyes and the involuntary curve of the tight mouth.

Elspeth drew him closer, whispering: 'If it was your grandchild and you were in Mrs Caxton's position, wouldn't you do the same?'

He looked at her doubtfully, and she met his gaze with candid, loving eyes that revealed nothing. He swung away, snapping his fingers in exasperation.

'All right.' He turned sharply to Tempe. 'And now, since I'm not a man to beat about the bush, you'd better come along to my study and I'll take down details.'

She battened down the surge of triumph and answered levelly: 'There's no need. I made all the notes before I came.'

Flipping through the sheets of copy paper he said with heavy irony: 'You should have been a journalist.'

She met his eyes calmly. 'I had a lot of training, getting my programmes ready. I haven't to tell you that a successful T.V. show needs careful preparation.'

'Hm! Since you're apparently quite clear on what you'd want done and, like most people, imagine newspaper pro-

prietors can do everything, you might tell me where you think we should begin.'

'First, take up the matter of Larry and the police. It's a major scandal what they're doing to Aborigines in Redfern.'

'All right! Frankly I don't care a damn about your Aboriginal friends, but some of the police are getting above themselves. And not only here. Our Brisbane paper is taking up a case. What else?'

'Send a first-class man to Whaler's.'

'Would Anderson suit you?' There was sarcasm in his voice and expression. He knew she would know that Anderson was their star reporter.

'Fine. He can come back with me tomorrow.'

'You're going back there?'

'Yes.'

'What about your I.V. session?'

'I've given it up. My sponsors have decided I'm too old for a glamour job and I think they're right.'

His eyes flickered up and down, taking in every detail of her appearance.

'You're still a good-looking woman,' he said grudgingly.

'Thank you. But for I.V. that's not enough. The cameras see more than the human eye.'

He sat down and studied the notes with assumed interest, then looked up and asked sharply.

'Are you going to live in Sydney when you retire?'

'I'm not going to retire in Sydney or anywhere else. Even if I wanted to I couldn't afford it.'

'Do you want to?'

'No. I want to get some other kind of job—something more useful than the one I had, I hope.'

He leaned forward, his hands on his knees, demanding to know what he could not ask: was she still involved with

Keith? Was Keith still involved with her? The question was flickering behind his eyes, sharpening his voice, tensing his heavy limbs. Was she a threat to Elspeth? That was all he cared about. It was interesting, Tempe thought to see the man whom everybody feared reduced to a fencing-bout. 'I never beat about the bush,' he had said. And here was a case where that was all he could do.

He asked tentatively: 'Would you be prepared to take a job outside Sydney?'

'That wouldn't worry me at all, though I would like it to be close enough for me to be able to see my granddaughter fairly often.' Greatly daring, she smiled at him and said: 'You'll understand how I feel.'

He grunted non-committally. 'There's an old saying: when one door closes another opens.'

'I've heard it, though I haven't much faith in it.'

'It's opening now.'

He stood before her, towering, dominant; and for the first time she felt his power over her as Keith had often described it. 'You might as well save your breath arguing with the Old Man. He always wins.' So far in this silent duel she was winning. What now?

'You have a keen eye. I see, on what the public likes.'

'I made my living from that for a long time.'

'Would you like to use your name—and your granddaughter's—for a new kind of session? Though I should remind you that, in the public eye, whatever it may be in fact, grandmothers have no glamour.'

'They'd never let me do it.'

'They'll let you. Would you like to do it?'

She showed the interest she genuinely felt. 'It sounds like the type of session I've been dreaming of, but who would let me do it?'

'We're opening a new T.V. station near Newcastle.'

He stopped, waiting for her reaction.

Tempe read behind the strong face the thoughts that he could not express. 'This will finish her as a danger to Elspeth. Grandmothers have no glamour. Grandmothers of Aboriginal children have less.' How clever he thought he was.

He was watching her. 'You could give your story strong human interest appeal,' he went on. 'It would win popular support for your friends at Whaler's. Then, with that out of the way, you could make it a topical session, wider than the usual women's session. Frankly, I think their day is over. I'll give you *carte blanche* to say what you like--within the limits of our policy, of course. And from now on Whaler's will be No. 1 policy with the paper until everything's fixed up. Agreed?'

She nodded, her throat too tight to allow the words to pass.

'You'll have to live in Newcastle, of course. That's close enough for you to drive up to see your granddaughter as often as you like. The station will take over your flat here at a good price if you are willing and will arrange about accommodation there.'

'Keep out of Sydney,' his eyes said. 'Keep away from my daughter.'

Caution rose in her. Part of her mind warned: 'Look out! Don't let him promise something just to get rid of you. This isn't only your own life at stake. This is Whaler's future. Kristina's future.'

He doesn't understand any of that, she told herself, seeing him poised to drive home the final thrust that would make Elspeth safe for ever. All the weapons in his hands.

She remembered Keith's stories of his ruthlessness and unscrupulousness in anything affecting his own interest.

He could trick her. He could ruin her. Pushed to it he would not hesitate to do either or both.

She drew in her breath as she was accustomed to when she was preparing to begin her session and let her lips curve in the smile that had fascinated so many viewers.

‘Shall we discuss my contract first, Mr Robertson?’

His face bore the look of astonishment of the champion fencer disarmed by an unskilled adversary.

Then he gave a roar of laughter and went on laughing, till Elspeth was infected by it, and each time it seemed that it was subsiding, one or the other went off again

At last he stopped, wiping his streaming eyes. ‘Good. We’ll draw it up now.’ He stood, looking at Tempe admiringly. ‘Who was it invented the myth of the weaker sex?’

\* \* \* \* \*

The plane soared through the dull morning and Sydney unfolded below in an indented frame of pewter grey sea. As the city slid away Tempe felt that with it she sloughed off her old life. A pang of regret for all she was leaving behind shot through her. They said you felt the pain of an amputated limb long after it was gone. How then could you hope to amputate half your life without suffering?

Her mind shuttled between memory and anticipation: the old grief burning poker-patterns on her brain, the regret that was slowly becoming grief for Zanny’s death; the emotion she felt for Kristy which she wanted to crystallize into love and the doubt whether Kristy would love her in return. Irony that she who had built her life on love faced a life without it.

Anderson, who had dropped into the seat beside her at the last moment, opened the morning's copy of the *Globe* and handed it to her with a twinkle: 'Good beginning!'

There under a bold four column heading: 'HISTORIC WHALER'S IN DANGER' with a heavy black introduction, was the opening shot in the campaign to save Whaler's.

She skimmed over the news story. Robertson must have dictated the essence of it over the phone immediately she had left him. For all her long association with Keith she still marvelled that so much could be condensed into so few paragraphs. She read and re-read it, elated with triumph and something else she did not stop to analyse. Enough that she had won.

Anderson leaned over again and tapped the leader 'Read that!'

'The Whaler's Affair' leapt out at her. Her eyes ran along the opening words:

'An outraged public is determined that the pioneer family which has through four generations occupied the old North Coast whaling station known as "Whaler's" shall not be robbed of its heritage....'

This was the paper speaking in support of the news. She settled back to read.

'... disgraceful treatment of reputable family ... the Premier, acting for the Minister of Lands during his absence, declared himself in definite terms against ... the Minister for Defence denied any intention ... the Commissioner of Police said he would ask for an immediate report ... prompt action by all sections concerned shows how greatly public opinion has been stirred by the affair....'

Here was public opinion getting the necessary briefing. She recalled Keith's cynical comment in another cam-

paign: 'That's how we do it when we want to!'

He had told her that the editor rarely wrote the leaders. Yet here was his sharp wording; his phrases that hit like a blow; his arguments a strong blend of indignation, sentiment and moralizing. Perhaps Elspeth had suggested to her father that Keith should write it—opening shot in HER campaign.

That was their affair. Hers was the fight for Kristy and Whaler's.

Anderson had been watching her. 'Good, eh?' he said with an approving twist of the head. 'Did you hear the report on the radio this morning?'

'No. I didn't have time.'

'First-class story. You ought to be pleased. I believe you're behind this protest.'

'Yes. My granddaughter belongs to Whaler's.'

'Well, what do you know! The Boss didn't tell me that. Can I use that angle?'

'If you think it useful.'

'Could be a winner. We'll see.' He took out a wad of copy paper. 'The editor gave me the dope but I'd better check. I'll give you the points I've got and you can fill in the blanks—if any. And anyway you'll be on hand all the time to refer to.'

He scribbled abbreviated notes in a rapid longhand. As she answered his queries she saw the smokestacks of the steelworks through the fog clouding Newcastle. Somewhere down there her own battle would be fought out in a future as shadowy as the city whose outlines she could only vaguely see.

What lay ahead for her? She had her contract—a good one—for her T.V. session, and, on thinking it over she was sure she had the ability to do what she had rashly assured Robertson she could do. But she had known too



much of success to believe that would fill her life.

Keith was right in one thing at least: There's a life outside love. She knew now that you couldn't build soundly on his kind of love. But what did you substitute for it?

The elation of personal triumph gave way to gnawing doubt. Even if she were successful there would be no core to her life. No one would really need her. With Zanny's ghost between them and her, would not the Swanberg family be likely to consider, once she had served their purpose, that Kristy was more theirs than hers?

The Hogsback loomed out of the mist as they came in over Wallaba, washed by a mid-winter blue sea. She looked down through the trees onto the white dot of the Superintendent's house, the drab humpies lining the creek, the dwarfed figures on the Reserve and in sudden illumination saw herself as part of the long bitter struggle in which they were all involved.

It was then she knew that her future would be rooted in something even deeper and wider than Kristy's love.

The plane flew low over the green jewel of Whaler's, and taxied to a stop. From the platform of the landing steps she saw with an uprush of joy the dark faces lifted to greet her: Bert, Emma, Paul, May, and topping them all from Jed's shoulder, a laughing Kristy waving a welcome.

As she walked down the steps she had the fleeting illusion that Christopher walked beside her.